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The Process of General Education Reform From A Faculty Perspective At A Research-Extensive University: A Grounded Theory Approach

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THE PROCESS OF GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM FROM A FACULTY PERSPECTIVE AT A RESEARCH-EXTENSIVE UNIVERSITY: A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

by

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THE PROCESS OF GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM FROM A FACULTY PERSPECTIVE AT A RESEARCH-EXTENSIVE UNIVERSITY: A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

Frauke Hachtmann, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2010

Adviser: Aleidine Moeller

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory for institutional change that explains the process and implementation of “Achievement-Centered Education” (ACE) from the faculty perspective. ACE is a new general education program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a public, doctoral/research-extensive institution. A constant comparative method was used to study the process of change retrospectively after a new, outcomes-based program was developed and implemented. Twenty-nine faculty from eight undergraduate colleges participated in this study through in-depth interviews.

This study resulted in a theory of the process and implementation of general education reform at a public, doctoral/research-extensive university from the faculty perspective. The theory is presented in narrative form as well as in a visual model. The model visualizes the emerging theory and theoretical propositions, and explains how different causal, intervening, and contextual conditions interact with and affect the phenomenon of general education reform at a public, doctoral/research-extensive university. The model portrays change as cyclical in nature with a limited life cycle. Internal and external pressures, such as assessment mandates and accreditation requirements, motivated faculty and administrators to consider changing the previous
general education program. The phenomenon consisted of the call for change that came from the administration, appointing a committee, developing the program, adopting the program, and populating the program. Intervening conditions, such as institutional culture, campus politics, and a challenging economic climate, as well as contextual conditions, including faculty buy-in, leadership, and an aggressive timeline, provided specific conditions in which the new program was developed, adopted, and implemented. The level of faculty involvement combined with the power of key individuals were important strategies in the process to generate ideas, negotiate solutions, and implement a new general education program. The process also included several consequences, such as the new program’s impact on the quality of education, the extent to which it is accountable/assessable, sustainable, and marketable. Eventually, the consequences will become causal conditions that will again start the cycle of reform.
Dedication

Many years ago I decided to move from Germany to the United States to pursue a degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. My parents, not quite sure why their daughter decided to move 5,000 miles away, supported my decision every step of the way even if it meant spending long periods of time away from each other. Nineteen years and four degrees later I find myself at a point I never thought I could achieve: completing a Ph.D. and becoming a true scholar in my own right.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Gardy and Peter, who watched this incredible journey from afar and believed that I could do it even if they could not physically be there. Although my father departed too soon to witness my entire educational path, I know that he’s watching from above. It was not always easy but knowing that you believed in me made it possible. I am forever grateful that you let me pursue my dream half-way around the world. Ohne Euch hätte ich es nie geschafft…
Acknowledgments

“The aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education and the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth.” (John Dewey).

This dissertation is the culmination of my incredible experience as a Ph.D. student in Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education and a symbol of growth from an inexperienced instructor to becoming a true scholar. Although a dissertation is supposed to be evidence of individual scholarship, I could not have accomplished it (and the long journey that led toward it) without the help of numerous individuals.

I had the privilege of working with an incredibly insightful supervisory committee. First and foremost, I am forever indebted to Dr. Ali Moeller, who was instrumental in nurturing my professional and personal growth over the past six years. In her, I found so much more than an adviser and teacher; she became a mentor, role model and friend for life. She helped me successfully work through the promotion and tenure process in my college and pushed me to do better work than I thought I was capable of. Her best piece of advice was to “work hard and let my work speak for itself,” which I try to follow each and every day. I look forward to spending many more years with her collaborating on projects that range from conducting research together to taking students on study abroad trips to Germany.

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“garden.” Her leadership has greatly contributed to my growth as a teacher, researcher, and service provider and I look forward to many more years of working together.

Thank you also to Dr. Guy Trainin for always asking the “tough questions” (I think he would be an excellent journalist!). Although this dissertation was not a meta-analysis, I benefited from his ability to “think outside the box” and from challenging me to look beyond the obvious answer. Dr. Kathy Wilson – thank you for keeping me focused early on when I was about to bite off more than I could chew. And thank you to Dr. Miles Bryant for sharing his expertise in organizational culture as I was shaping the study.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

General education is firmly grounded in the modern American collegiate experience. Currently, more than 85 percent of colleges and universities in the United States require all of their students to complete some general education requirements (Black Duesterhaus, 2003). Rooted in the European model of classic education that includes the study of classic literary works, philosophy, foreign languages, rhetoric and logic, the U.S. model is characterized by an additional layer of practicality (Black Duesterhaus, 2003). Whereas the European model was designed to prepare students for a handful of professional careers mostly in law and medicine, the U.S. model aspires to prepare students for a larger variety of professions. Therefore, students in the United States are exposed to a more selective model of general education when compared to the classic European model upon which it was built. The major forces of general education reform in the U.S. were a response to societal needs during the mid- and late-twentieth century, as well as more specialized demands from the industry to equip students with skills for the professional world. The purpose of general education shifted to add an element of practical training in a specific discipline through a survey of courses that promoted critical thinking and an awareness of the world in which students worked and lived (Black Duesterhaus, 2003). According to a survey among representatives of the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) more than half its members indicated that general education has increased as a priority at their institutions and almost 90 percent of higher education institutions are currently either assessing or modifying
their general education programs (Hart Research Associates, 2009). However, according to the AAC&U, 95 percent of general education reform failures are directly related to failure in process.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is the State of Nebraska’s land grant institution. In 2005, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor Harvey Perlman called for a general education reform because the current curriculum was viewed as complicated and unattractive for students transferring from one college to another and from other universities (Kean, Mitchell, & Wilson, 2008). After much planning, discussions, and voting in each of the eight undergraduate colleges, UNL launched a new, outcomes-based general education program in the fall of 2009 called “Achievement-Centered Education” (ACE), replacing the previous subject-based program. The program consists of 10 carefully constructed student-learning outcomes that all UNL students must achieve before graduating. Over the course of two and a half years, faculty developed a set of outcomes that reflects what they believe graduates ought to know as they embark on their careers in the twenty-first century. In addition to the 10 outcomes, faculty also developed a set of governing documents that stipulate the structural criteria, the process for reviewing and certifying an initial set of ACE courses, as well as the new program’s governance and assessment structure (Appendix A).

General education reform would not be possible without strong administrative and faculty leadership. While the process of ACE from an institutional perspective is well documented (Mitchell, Jonson, Goodburn, Minter, Wilson, & Kean, forthcoming; Kean et al., 2008), there is a lack of primary research that explores the process of ACE from a faculty perspective. In addition, no research currently exists that focuses on the
implementation of ACE, which requires faculty to write course proposals and assess
student learning in the courses. The institution is hoping that the implementation of ACE
will result in a cultural shift away from a subject-based program to an outcomes-based
program that is student-centered as opposed to teacher-centered. However, it is not clear
whether faculty are aware of this shift. Understanding the factors that affect change and
how faculty respond to change is important for successful implementation of change
(Noll, 2001). Anchoring change in an organization’s culture is a key ingredient in
sustainable transformation (Kotter, 1998). However, the organizational culture of UNL
from a faculty perspective at the time of development and implementation of ACE has
not been explored systematically.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this grounded theory case study was to develop a theory for
institutional change that explains the process and implementation of “Achievement-
Centered Education” (ACE), a new general education program from the faculty
perspective at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. No theory currently exists that
explains the process of general education reform at a doctoral/research-extensive
university. Grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was applied in this
study of cultural change.
Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following two central research question: What is the theory that explains the process of the development and implementation of general education reform at UNL? How did it unfold?

Creswell (2007) suggests that the central research questions in a grounded theory study be followed by a small number of procedural sub-questions. In a grounded theory study the steps are to identify the central phenomenon, the causal conditions, the intervening conditions, and the strategies and consequences. Therefore, during the initial stages data collection sought to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What was central to the process? (core phenomenon)
2. What influenced or caused this phenomenon to occur? (causal conditions)
3. What strategies were employed during the process? (strategies)
4. What effect occurred? (consequences)

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be used:

Curriculum includes both an individual and collective learning experience. It “presents an academic plan, a designed progression of coursework framing the students’ experience in higher education” (Huggett, Smith, & Conrad, 2003).

Faculty can be defined as part-time or full-time instructors with a teaching appointment at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
**General education** is “the part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities. General Education may also be called ‘the core curriculum’ or ‘liberal studies’” and can be viewed as specific courses or a menu of courses (“What is Liberal Education,” 2009).

**Liberal education** is “an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings” (“What is Liberal Education,” 2009).

**Governance** is “the way that issues affecting the entire institution, or one or more components thereof, are decided. It includes the structure and processes, both formal and informal, of decision-making groups and the relationships between and among these groups and individuals” (Kezar, 2002).

**Grounded theory** can be defined as “systematic, qualitative procedures that researchers use to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, action, or interaction about a substantive topic” (Creswell, 2005, p. 592).

**Organizational culture** can be defined as “deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that
members have about their organization or where they work” (Peterson & Spencer, 1991, p. 142)

*Process* will be defined as “sequences of evolving action/interaction, changes which can be traced to changes in structural conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 163).

*Doctoral/Research Extensive university* means that the university is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as an institution that awards at least 20 doctoral degrees a year (Carnegie Foundation, 2009).

Theory is “a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15).

**Delimitations and Limitations**

**Delimitations.** Delimitations narrow the scope of the research (Creswell, 2005). The research will be confined to studying general education reform at one doctoral granting/research extensive institution: the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The participants will consist of only UNL faculty but will include faculty at all academic ranks. The research will be limited to examining the process of general education reform at UNL. The study will be directed toward generating grounded theory that explains the process that occurred in revising, approving, and implementing the general education program at UNL.

**Limitations.** The strength of this study is that it generated theory grounded in the data that will help to explain the general education process at UNL from a faculty perspective. However, the study may have several limitations. The data were subject to
different interpretations by different readers due to the nature of qualitative research (Merriam, 1988). The substantive-level theory that resulted from this study can be generalized to the subjects of the study but do not provide broad generalizability because of the purposeful, theoretical sampling frame. The study created a story that explains the process of general education reform but will refrain from describing any one participant in depth.

**Significance of the Study**

A study of the process of general education reform at UNL is important for several reasons. First, it will add to the existing scholarly research and literature of general education reform because despite the large number of studies describing general education reform at a variety of institutions, no theory currently exists that explains the process of development and implementation of general education reform from a faculty perspective at a public land-grant, research-extensive university. Researchers may use the theoretical propositions of this study and test them quantitatively.

Second, this study will help improve practice as 89 percent of higher education institutions across the country are currently in the process of assessing or modifying their general education programs (Hart Research Associates, 2009). These activities are generally prompted by public concern about the quality of higher education (Association of American Colleges, 1994), the call by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1977) to become more accountable for student learning, as well as assessment mandates by various accreditation groups. As faculty are ultimately responsible for curricular change, understanding the theory of the change process could
help other institutions to implement effective strategies when revising their general education programs. In addition, this study will help UNL to implement and sustain ACE in the long-run because it will uncover the university’s organizational culture. Tierney (1988) identified five advantages of becoming aware of organizational culture, including: (1) an understanding of the conflicts “on the broad canvas of organizational life,” (2) recognition of how tensions in the organization are played out in operational and structural issues, (3) making decisions with “keen awareness” of their impact on groups within the institution, (4) understanding the symbolic nature of seemingly instrumental actions, and (5) consideration of why different groups in the organization have different perspectives on how the organization is performing.

Finally, this study may improve policy at UNL as well as other institutions regarding the selection of faculty to serve on committees that are charged with developing or implementing curricular change. Universities across the nation are faced with tighter budgets and are expected to do more with less. Therefore, a study that addresses the change process of general education may provide universities with theoretical propositions that might help them to respond to economical pressures more efficiently and effectively. By exploring the perspectives of faculty at UNL after ACE has been developed and implemented, this research attempts to uncover strategies that were used to design and approve an outcomes-based general education program on a tight timeline.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The Evolution of General Education

The mission of higher education. The original mission of American higher education was to provide students with a liberal education that was rooted in the European model of classic education. This model included the study of classic literary works, philosophy, foreign languages, rhetoric and logic (Black Duesterhaus, 2003). The goal was to provide a broad base of education that would encourage “an appreciation of knowledge, ability to think and solve problems, and a desire to improve society” (Black Duesterhaus, 2003, p. 923). However, the European model had several limitations because traditionally it only prepared a few privileged students for a handful of professional careers, mostly in law and medicine (Boning, 2007). American society began calling for a more utilitarian and practical education that would prepare a more diverse student body for a variety of careers upon graduation. The idea was to keep the strong liberal arts focus that the European model of general education emphasized, but to add practicality to it.

For more than 200 years American colleges and universities have tried to develop optimal general education programs with varied success (Boning, 2007). The Morrill Act of the mid-nineteenth century provided funds in each state for a land-grant university to promote liberal and practical education of the industrial classes (Boning, 2007). By the late 1800s the utilitarian model resulted in a more heterogeneous student body that had the ability to choose courses freely, without requirements. Students could declare a
concentration or major that would prepare them for their professions with an emphasis in agricultural and technical programs (Black Duesterhaus, 2003). One hundred years later, many professional fields had become part of a four-year college education, including teaching, business, engineering, and nursing.

**General education versus liberal education.** In the mid-twentieth century the core of the debate about the development of general education was fueled by those who believed that students should be prepared with skills for the professional world and those who argued that such a focus would be useless as vocational skills and technologies changed too rapidly. In addition, those who were opposed to the more specialized program contended that it lacked a focus on society and failed to prepare students to contribute meaningfully to society as a whole. In 1948, the President’s Commission on Higher Education demanded to combine specialized, vocational training with a general curriculum “to foster the transmission of a common cultural heritage toward common citizenship” (President’s Commission, 1948). Many colleges and universities started to develop a set of courses that all students would be required to take, which became known as “general education.” Currently, more than 85 percent of American colleges and universities require that their students complete some form of general education requirements. While liberal education can be defined as an educational philosophy that “empowers individuals, liberates the mind from ignorance, and cultivates society” (What is Liberal Education, 2009), general education refers to a part of the liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It exposes students to multiple disciplines and provides the basis of intellectual and civic responsibilities.
**Change forces.** The system gave the students more choices and over time departments became more powerful because it gave faculty greater freedom to pursue their own research at the expense of teaching. This shift resulted in a lack of teaching standards while fragmenting the academic community (Boning, 2007). By the 1970s, general education in the United States had eroded into a “disaster area” that no longer provided common student experiences and devalued the baccalaureate degree (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977). In addition, many general education courses did not transfer among colleges of the same institution and from other institutions, making it more difficult for students to complete their general education requirements.

A series of social and political forces produced a climate that called for general education reform. The economic recession of the 1970s shifted the focus of the student-centered curriculum from the 1960s to an increased emphasis on producing employment prospects (DeZure, 2003). Although efforts were made to prepare students better with skills needed in a variety of professions, business leaders were disappointed by the lack of skills graduates were equipped with upon graduation. Industry leaders needed college graduates to be able to “solve problems, communicate through writing and speaking, engage in ethical decision-making, work in teams, and interact effectively with diverse others” (DeZure, 2003).

**National reports.** Several reports from panels of experts assembled by federal agencies, educational lobbying organizations, and private foundations called for general education reform to address the lack of accessibility, quality, and coherence of liberal education in the United States (Lattuca, 2003). In 1983, the National Commission on
Excellence in Education investigated the quality of education in the United States (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report found that high school students were inadequately prepared for college, and that college admission test scores were declining. The report ended with a call for more scrutiny at the college and university education as well as increased accountability at the postsecondary level. Two reports in the 1980s stressed that a core curriculum was essential to ensure coherence in general education. Bennett (1984), representing the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) suggested in *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* that students should learn about their own origins and development of their civilization and culture through Western literature, history, art, politics, and society. Five years later, Cheney (1989), who succeeded Bennett at the helm of the NEH, added in *50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students*, that students should also know about additional civilizations, foreign languages, science, mathematics, and social sciences. In *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education*, the National Institute of Education (NIE) focused on student learning instead of prescribing the content of the curriculum. These areas included student involvement, high expectations that must be communicated to students, and assessment and feedback to systematically assess whether expectations for students learning are met (National Institute of Education, 1984). In addition, the NIE called for an expansion of the liberal education requirement of two years of the undergraduate curriculum. The Association of American Colleges (AAC) issued *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community* in 1985, examining the meaning of the baccalaureate degree. The report states that the baccalaureate credential had become more important than the course
of study and that universities had given in to the demands of the professional world. In addition to identifying nine content areas of general education, the AAC called on faculty to develop educational experiences for students to help them recognize the connections among different fields of knowledge as well as other areas of life and work (Association of American Colleges, 1985).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, educational foundations, government agencies, state boards and accrediting bodies started to demand increased accountability and assessment of student learning outcomes, which shifted the focus from what instructors do to what students learn (DeZure, 2003). In the late 1980s, Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation, published College: The Undergraduate Experience in America (1987), in which he described how vocationalism, different priorities of faculty, fragmentation of knowledge and the loss of cultural commonalities and coherence had contributed to the decline of the undergraduate curriculum. He recommended a set of seven general education objectives, including language, art, heritage, society, nature, ecology, work, and identity and called upon faculty to connect those areas to life experiences. Boyer believed that a coherent education would contribute to develop students as individuals as well as members of a community. In addition, he believed that it was imperative that students become more involved in their own learning and for faculty to foster learning by using active learning techniques in their classrooms. The AAC also urged faculty to inform their students about the purpose of their courses and how they fit into the larger curriculum. While the AAC suggested that students should be seen as co-inquirers of their own learning, Boyer placed additional emphasis on faculty inquiry into their own teaching. Boyer’s (1990) Scholarship Reconsidered was a key
publication that contributed to the rise of the scholarship of teaching as a way to rigorously inquire about the learning processes in the classroom. Thus, the early 1990s were characterized by a focus on research about effective teaching and student learning, which established accountability and legitimacy of learning among faculty, departments, colleges, and institutions.

During this time many universities established teaching and learning centers to assist and support faculty in their efforts to document and improve students learning (DeZure, 2003). A second report, *A New Vitality for General Education*, the AAC (1988) first gave rise to the idea that that general education programs should provide students with a set of skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry in writing that should be rooted in content. The report urged institutions to incorporate assessment of competencies into their general education programs. In 1994 the AAC issued, *Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs*, which included a series of principles that emphasize communicating the value of general education and increasing support of it among students, faculty, and administrators.

In the early twenty-first century most institutions in the United States have curricula that include general education or liberal studies, a major specialization, minors, and electives so that students will gain breadth of knowledge through distribution requirements, as well as depth of knowledge through their majors (DeZure, 2003). One important change is that the focus is shifting more and more away from content knowledge of specific facts to broadly defined competencies of what students should be able to do upon graduation. This shift in focus is an important step to ensure that students will have the skills that industry professionals are seeking in new hires.
Trends in general education. A recent survey among AAC&U administrators indicates that for the majority of member institutions, general education has increased as a priority for their institution. In fact, 89 percent of them are currently in the process of assessing or changing their general education programs (Hart Research Associates, 2009).

Despite these efforts, only 18 percent of those member institutions are actually implementing changes adopted in the past five years (Hart Research Associates, 2009). Rhodes (2003) explains that during the last decade of the twentieth century curriculum reform was slowed by three obstacles: the content of the core, student demands, and fragmentation. As many faculty proposed a return to the core curriculum, others questioned whether the content of the core was still valid, as it was largely based on Western civilization. They called for a diversified curriculum. In addition, as more students started to go to college, many of them focused on relatively narrow vocational majors that would primarily prepare them for a job instead of pursuing a more general liberal arts degree. From 1968 to 1986, baccalaureate degrees in arts & sciences dwindled from 47 percent to 26 percent, respectively (Turner & Bowen, 1990). The third obstacle was that university communities were rather fragmented, lacking a commitment in common educational goals. Rhodes (2003) explains that faculty added courses that reflected their own educational goals with very specialized knowledge and subject areas, while students experienced the burden of increasingly large course offerings with little guidance about setting educational priorities. Rhodes recommends that in order to overcome these obstacles, faculty must recapture the curriculum by defining educational goals, priorities, and requirements. While students must be able to make choices as part
of their undergraduate experience, the faculty’s goal should be “to equip graduates for both employment and life as motivated self-starters, with a thirst for understanding and the discipline and skills to satisfy it” (Rhodes, 2003, p. 94).

Some of the current trends in recent general education reform include (1) an emphasis on the demonstration of broad competencies as opposed to learning goals that focus on the mastery of content, (2) the importance of integrative learning experiences across the curriculum, and (3) a focus on improving learning by improving instructional methods and assessments of student learning (DeZure, 2003). In the twenty-first century most undergraduate curricula consist of general education or liberal studies, a major and often minors, as well as electives in order to ensure breadth of knowledge through distribution requirements and depth of knowledge and skills through the major. However, the goals of learning have changed. Whereas knowledge of disciplinary facts and concepts used to be the emphasis, now the focus of student learning is on broadly defined competencies to ensure that students are well equipped to be responsible citizens and professionals upon graduation. In 2009, 78 percent of AAC&U member institutions indicated that they have a common set of intended learning outcomes for all of their undergraduate students (Hart Research Associates, 2009). Typically, the areas of proficiency include “critical thinking and problem-solving; multiple modes of inquiry in the natural sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, and arts; communication skills including writing, speaking, and listening; technology and information literacy; sensitivity to diversity, including multicultural and intercultural competencies for participation in a pluralistic society; civics, global, and environmental responsibility and engagement; interpersonal skills, including teamwork and
collaboration; self-awareness; moral and ethical reasoning, and integration of knowledge from diverse sources” (DeZure, 2003, p. 511). Many AAC&U member institutions indicate that the outcomes they are focusing on are those that employers said they would like to see in college graduates (Hart Research Associates, 2009). One of AAC&U’s most recent initiatives is “Liberal Education and America’s Promise” (LEAP), which focuses on the quality of student learning. AAC&U’s (2007) report *College Learning for the New Global Century* suggests that students should prepare for “twenty-first century challenges” (p. 3) by achieving four essential learning outcomes, including (1) knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, (2) intellectual and practical skills (inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, and teamwork and problem solving), (3) personal and social responsibility (civic knowledge and engagement – local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning), and (4) integrative learning (synthesis and advanced accomplishments across general and specialized studies).

One of the challenges for students is to achieve all of those competencies as part of the general education program. In fact, less than half of AAC&U’s member institutions believe that their general education programs are well integrated with their students’ major requirements (Hart Research Associates, 2009). Therefore, many institutions have started to “blur the lines” between the general education program and the major (DeZure, 2003). For example, there could be upper division writing requirements or writing-intensive courses in the major or an integrative capstone course
that requires collaborative teamwork. Other examples include ethics and civics courses in the major, as well as information and technology literacy and multiculturalism courses.

Another trend is an emphasis on multicultural learning, which refers to “sensitivity to difference, including race, gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and disability” (DeZure, 2003, p. 511). Finally, global competencies have become a focus of liberal education. DeZure (2003) states that it is difficult for American students to develop proficiency in this area during college, which consists of foreign language study, study abroad, global studies, and the presence of international students.

**Curriculum coherence.** Coherence has been an ongoing issue in general education because critics claimed that the undergraduate curriculum is “too fragmented, [and] burdened with too many isolated bits of information” (DeZure, 2003, p. 511). “Coherent general education” can be defined as an educational program where “students are able to make connections and integrate their knowledge” (Boning, 2007, p. 1). Researchers argue that these connections should occur within the disciplines, among disciplines, to real life and the world, and to majors and careers. Universities have started to implement two strategies to help students integrate the various elements of their college experience.

The first strategy is to clarify, tighten, and sequence requirements, which is directly opposite to the reduced requirements during the 1970s and 1980s. The second strategy is to provide educational opportunities that are tailored toward the needs to students at different stages of their college careers. These opportunities include first-year programs, orientation courses, first-year seminars, access to academic support services,
and learning communities (DeZure, 2003). The overall goal of increasing coherence in general education programs is to ease the transition from high school to college at the beginning of students’ academic career and to ease the transition from college to the professional world toward the end of their academic careers. Coherence toward the end of students’ college experience includes senior seminars and capstone learning experiences to help students relate concepts and information learned in class to the real working world. Another trend to achieve coherence is the development of interdisciplinary courses and programs to help students make connections among subject areas that were previously taught separately (DeZure, 2003).

**Scholarship of teaching and learning.** Innovative instructional methods based on faculty inquiry into their own teaching and student learning play a major role in general education reform (DeZure, 2003). Innovative teaching methods include active and experiential learning, problem-based learning, collaborative and cooperative learning; team-based learning, undergraduate research, and instructional technology. According to Kuh (2001), 90 percent of seniors had participated in a group activity in class during college.

**Curriculum and assessment.** Scholars and practitioners from many disciplines have theorized about the design, organization, and delivery of general education for many years. However, the first substantive publication regarding postsecondary curricula appeared in the mid-twentieth century (Huggett et al., 2003). Tyler (1949) suggested that four essential questions shape knowledge in the curriculum, including the purpose the curriculum should serve; the experiences the institution and its faculty provide to meet that purpose; the effective organization of the curriculum; and the assessment of learning
outcomes. Taba (1962) added that a change in the curriculum reflects a change in the institution and calls for faculty to play an integral role in establishing goals and objectives for learning. Her seven-step model includes the following cycle: (1) defining the philosophy of the curriculum, (2) creating a learning environment, (3) delineating intended learning outcomes, (4) designing instruction, (5) delivering instruction, (6) assessing attended outcomes, and (7) improving instructional design. Many different delineations of this basic model occurred since Taba introduced it, but the basic idea stayed the same (Dressel, 1968; Conrad, 1978). Several scholars added the notion that curriculum is socially constructed, meaning that students, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders are reflected in its development (Mentkowski, 2000; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Ropers-Huilman, 1998).

Increasingly, assessment is becoming a major component of general education programs because the new set of competencies requires measurements of learning that evaluate higher-order critical thinking skills. Assessment methods often include “self-assessments, portfolios, journals, case studies, simulations, poster sessions, group projects, and technology-based innovations, which again reflect the shift from fragmentation to integration and from passive to active learning” (DeZure, 2003, p. 512). In 2009, almost all member institutions indicated that they have specified field-specific learning outcomes in some of their departments, while 65 percent said they have defined outcomes in all departments. However, only 30 percent of AAC&U’s membership institutions indicated that they were conducting assessments of learning outcomes in general education (Hart Research Associates, 2009).
General Education Reform at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is a land-grant university that was chartered in 1869. The university has been a member of the Association of American Universities since 1909, is recognized by the Carnegie Foundation as a doctoral/research extensive university and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. UNL’s primary missions include teaching, research, and service and is known as the “state’s primary intellectual center providing leadership throughout the state through quality education and the generation of new knowledge” (About UNL, 2009). UNL is designated a land grant university as well as a research-extensive institution, which supports outreach efforts in areas that have gained national and international recognition for advancing knowledge, discovering solutions to critical societal problems, developing professionals, and enhancing the lives of individuals, families, schools, and communities. Each of these aspects inform and affect others, stimulating and strengthening the university’s mission and values in action (Research and Outreach, 2010).

In 1995, the institution implemented a general education program known as “Comprehensive Education Program” (CEP). The university community was quite involved in the development of the program that was supposed to provide students with a broad knowledge base through the “Essential Studies” component and with important skills through the “Integrative Studies” component. However, ten years later, university administrators and many faculty realized that CEP had become ineffective and quite cumbersome for students to navigate. Over the course of a decade the program had grown to 2,300 courses that had never been comprehensively assessed. In addition, the CEP
became a burden for students and advisors who saw it as a barrier to degree completion. In addition, the program was not conducive for transfer students who needed to apply courses they had completed at other institutions to their degree program at UNL. After a decade, CEP was no longer aligned with national trends in general education that now focused on what students learn instead of covering a wide variety of different subjects (Reviewing and Revising General Education, 2009).

In 2000, UNL was invited by the AAC&U to become one of sixteen institutions to participate in its Greater Expectations Consortium on Quality Education. Participation in the initiative resulted in exposure to new ways of thinking about general education and a renewed ability of the institution to “articulate and develop a coherent strategy toward continuous improvement of the campus learning environment” (Kean et al., 2008).

In the spring and summer of 2003 the Faculty Senate Executive Committee met with faculty, students, and administrators to discuss the shortcoming of the CEP and established an ad hoc task force to develop a proposal for modifications of the current general education program (A Brief History, 2009). Over the course of the next academic year, the ad hoc committee met regularly to develop the proposal. It was presented as a motion and discussed in the Faculty Senate but ultimately tabled so that further discussions with the eight undergraduate colleges could be held. At this point the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs became involved in the process in order to lead the discussions between the Faculty Senate ad hoc committee and the colleges (Kean et al., 2008). In the fall of 2004, the College of Arts & Sciences, which historically had been the largest provider of general education courses, submitted a counter-proposal, which was reconciled with the original proposal drafted by
the Faculty Senate ad hoc task force. In the spring of 2005, the Deans of the eight colleges approved some small changes to the proposal, while the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs appointed a small committee of faculty and administrators known as the General Education Planning Team (GEPT) to attend the 2005 AAC&U Institute on General Education and to learn about contemporary thinking on general education, to interact with representatives from other universities that are going through a similar process, and to develop a plan for reviewing and reforming general education at UNL. GEPT was charged to coordinate the review and reform effort and to prepare – with broad input from the UNL community – a set of proposals for review and approval. The committee was chaired by a faculty member in Arts & Sciences, and included an additional five members of the faculty, a representative of the Academic Planning Committee (APC), past Presidents of the Faculty Senate, as well as three administrators. The committee returned from the institute with a plan for a new approach to general education – one that would focus on student learning outcomes instead of a subject-based program.

In the summer of 2005 both the Chancellor and the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs approved the plan presented by GEPT. GEPT also recommended establishing a larger working advisory group, known as the General Education Advisory Council (GEAC). While GEPT’s responsibility was to coordinate and review the reform process, GEAC was charged to design the actual general education program. The goal was to build a general education program that would be “coherent, transparent, flexible, student-centered, transferable among the eight undergraduate colleges and consistent with national contemporary thinking about what students ought to know upon graduation”
(Kean et al., 2008). GEAC had broad campus representation, including faculty representation from all eight colleges, students, administrators, and the University libraries. Consultative bodies included the Academic Planning Committee, Faculty Senate, the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, the Admission, Advising, and Retention Committee, Associated Students of the University of Nebraska, the Dean’s Council, department chairs and heads, the Enrollment Management Council, the Reinvigorating the Humanities Council, and the Teaching Council (A Brief History, 2009).

GEAC, in consultation with the eight undergraduate colleges and various faculty groups as well as students, developed a set of four institutional objectives and 10 related, assessable student learning outcomes that became known as “Achievement-Centered Education” (ACE) (Kean et al., 2008). The group was inspired by AAC&U’s (2007) LEAP initiative that identified four essential learning outcomes that would prepare students from twenty-first century challenges and developed a set of institutional objectives that was built upon the foundation established by LEAP (Appendix B). According to Maki (2004), institutional objectives identify content or learning expectations, whereas student learning outcomes identify what students should be able to demonstrate or produce as a result of what they have learned. In addition to developing the initial set of institutional objectives, GEAC created a set of governing documents that would guide the development of the program (Appendix A). The overall process was aided by a series of speakers who came to campus to share their knowledge of and experience with general education reform.

The program was voted into place in January 2008 by the faculty of all eight undergraduate colleges as part of a two-step vote. In the first round colleges were asked
to vote on the first two governing documents (“Institutional Objectives” and “Structural Criteria”), followed by a second round of votes on the third and fourth governing documents (“Populating ACE” and “Governance and Assessment”). The reason for the two-step voting process was to increase faculty buy-in at an early stage. Faculty were also told that the first two proposals could still be changed even after they were voted on. The voting in the eight colleges did not all occur on the same day. Instead, colleges opted to vote on the process as part of their regularly scheduled college faculty meetings. The College of Arts & Sciences voted for the first two proposals in principle but only after the Dean formed a committee to address concerns that had surfaced. The College of Architecture initially voted against the first two proposals but ended up voting again, resulting in a vote in favor of the first two proposals.

Once all eight colleges approved the four governing documents the Chancellor and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs established a new faculty team with the responsibility of implementing the new general education program. The Deans of the eight colleges each selected faculty members to represent their colleges on two committees: the interim Achievement-Centered Education committee (iACE) and the course facilitators. The iACE committee consisted of one voting representative from each college in charge of reviewing and certifying ACE proposals, as well as the chair of the University Curriculum Committee, the interim Director of General Education, and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies as ex-officio members. The course facilitators’ purpose was to help university faculty to develop and submit courses for ACE certification (ACE Holds Kick-Off Event, 2009). Course proposals for ACE consist of several components: a description of the course, indication of up to two ACE outcomes the course intends to
address, and a list of reinforcements (outcomes that are not the primary focus of the course); a description of the opportunities students have to learn the intended outcome; a discussion of the opportunities students have to demonstrate their achievement of the outcome; and a preliminary assessment plan. Over the course of 15 months, the iACE committee met weekly during the regular academic year and periodically over the summer to review and certify more than 400 courses. ACE was implemented in the fall of 2009, at which point the certification process was turned over to the University Curriculum Committee, consisting of another set of faculty.
CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

In the most basic sense, qualitative research is research about “people’s lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Rooted in anthropological and sociological research practices (Creswell, 2005), it inquires into the meaning of social or human problems in the context of individuals or groups who have shared lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). In contrast to quantitative research that uses statistical analysis for unbiased, objective inquiry of a research problem, qualitative research is a nonmathematical process of interpretation with the purpose of discovering new concepts and relationships and reorganizing information into a “theoretical explanatory scheme” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Researchers use an emerging qualitative approach in which the collection of data occurs in natural settings sensitive to the participants being studied. The data analysis is inductive and results in patterns or themes that can be further interpreted and reorganized to form new meaning. Qualitative research focuses on the views and voices of the participants, includes a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and adds to the existing literature (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative research has several common characteristics. For example, researchers conduct their qualitative study in a natural setting at the site where the participants experienced the phenomenon under investigation because observing how they behave in
the physical context of the study adds to the richness of the study. In addition, the researcher is a key instrument because she collects data from examining documents, observing and interpreting behavior, and interviewing participants. Instead of administering a questionnaire or other instrument the researcher uses an interview protocol that may change over the course of the study because this type of inquiry uses an emergent design. The phases of the process may change over the course of the study because the goal is to learn about the problem from the participants’ view. Qualitative research also uses multiple sources of data, all of which are used in the data analysis. The data analysis is inductive, meaning that patterns, categories, and themes are built from the “bottom-up” in increasingly larger increments. This process requires the researcher to work back and forth between themes and to work with the participants repeatedly in order to shape the themes and abstractions that emerge. The overall goal of qualitative research is to elicit the meaning of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants as opposed to bringing meaning from the literature. Often, qualitative research uses a theoretical lens that provides a framework for the study. It uses interpretive inquiry, which can bias the study because the researcher brings her own background, history, and context of the phenomenon under investigation into the study. The final characteristic of qualitative research is that it is supposed to provide a holistic account of the complex interactions and relationships of factors affecting a particular phenomenon. It reports multiple perspectives and tries to depict a larger picture of the research problem (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative methods can be used to explore a research problem about which little is known or about which new insights can be drawn. Qualitative inquiry can also extract
details about phenomena like feelings, thought processes and emotions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A qualitative research design was be most effective for this study because not much is known about the process and implementation of general education reform at UNL from a faculty perspective. Many institutions of higher education are currently involved in the process of general education reform and can benefit from learning about the experience at UNL. Therefore, a complex, detailed understanding of this issue is needed. In addition, this type of inquiry helped elicit faculty’s deep feelings and emotions about the process that are part of the institutional culture in which ACE was developed and implemented. The process empowered faculty to share their stories unencumbered by what might be expected from an institutional perspective.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

Qualitative research is often shaped by a particular worldview, or “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). This research study was shaped by social constructivism, a paradigm in which “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). The goal was to discover multiple meanings of the process of ACE from a faculty perspective, enabling the researcher to explore and interpret a multitude of views instead of categorizing the data into a limited number of predetermined typologies. The views of faculty were formed through interaction with others as well as through historical and cultural norms (Creswell, 2007). Some of the participants were actively involved in the development of ACE, while others became involved at a later time as ACE course instructors. Collectively, the participants were part of the organizational culture that comprises their respective
departments, colleges, and ultimately UNL’s community of scholars and learners. Constructivist researchers often focus on the processes of interaction between individuals. The constructivist paradigm tends to manifest itself in the grounded theory perspective because theory is inductively developed from the views of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative researchers make several assumptions about their research, including the nature of reality (ontological), the relationships between the researcher and what is being studied (epistemological), the role of values (axiological), the language of research (rhetorical), and the process of research (methodological) (Creswell, 2007).

**Ontological assumptions.** Qualitative research embraces multiple realities that are subjective and constructed by the individual. According to Corson (1975), faculty typically disagree on a variety of different matters for different reasons. The worldview of the participants with all of their different backgrounds, disciplinary approaches and philosophies provided the framework for this study because they helped shape the new general education program at UNL. The researcher used direct quotes from participants and elicited themes to provide evidence of different perspectives.

**Epistemological assumptions.** In a qualitative study the researcher tries to minimize the distance between herself and the participants because it is important to provide a physical context for understanding what participants are saying (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). The researcher collaborated with the participants and with the goal of becoming an “insider” (Creswell, 2007).

**Axiological assumptions.** Qualitative research is value-laden and certain biases are present (Creswell, 2007). Faculty had very strong opinions that were shaped by their
educational discipline, culture in their college, and personal preferences. It is important to note that the researcher brought certain biases into the research. For example, she was actively involved in the reform process in her role as a member on the committee that was charged with populating the new general education program. She was exposed to almost 500 ACE course proposals, deliberated with others on the committee and voted on each proposal for or against certification. As a result of actively serving on the interim ACE committee the researcher was a strong proponent of ACE and supported the process. As her home college’s assessment coordinator and member of the University-Wide Assessment Committee, she approached this study with certain dispositions. For example, she generally viewed an outcomes-based general education program as positive. She also believed that regular faculty inquiry into their teaching and student learning is necessary in order to improve learning effectively. Also, she was more involved in the process than the average faculty member, so her experiences with communication, decision-making and administrative pressure differed at times from those of the participants. However, she assumed a neutral stance toward the emerging themes and theory as suggested by Patton’s (1990) theme of neutral empathy. This study was framed by the realization that qualitative inquiry cannot be completely objective.

**Rhetorical assumptions.** The writing in this qualitative research is personal, literary, and includes definitions that emerge from the study. The narrative includes stories from the participants as well as definitions of terms and concepts that describe the change process (Creswell, 2007).

**Methodological assumptions.** As described in the methods section, the data collection strategy changed over time as this study evolved. This type of inductive
research was built from the ground up without preconceived notions of a guiding theory. The researcher followed a rigorous path of analyzing data to develop a complex description and interpretation of general education reform at UNL.

**Type of Design**

A research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and reporting research. More specifically, a grounded theory design is a “systematic, qualitative procedure that researchers use to generate a general explanation of a process, action, or interaction among people” (Creswell, 2005, p. 52). This grounded theory case study involved 29 UNL faculty members from all eight undergraduate colleges, including senior lecturers, assistant, associate, and full professors (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Characteristics of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Gender Male</th>
<th>Gender Female</th>
<th>Academic Rank Lect.</th>
<th>Academic Rank Assist.</th>
<th>Academic Rank Assoc.</th>
<th>Academic Rank Full</th>
<th>ACE*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ag. Sciences/Nat. Res.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Admin.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educ. &amp; Human Sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine &amp; Perf. Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journ. &amp; Mass Comm.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*individual served on one or more of the ACE committees.

As the largest college, Arts & Sciences was represented more heavily (nine participants) than the other colleges (ranging from two to four participants). About one
third of the participants were women. Every attempt was made to include an equal number of women in the sample but many of them were unavailable. In terms of academic rank, almost all of the participants (26) were tenured and more than half of them were fully promoted. The researcher attempted to select individuals so that all academic ranks would be represented equally, but most of the non-tenured or pre-tenure faculty indicated that they were either not knowledgeable enough about ACE to participate. In some cases they were completely unaware of the general education reform.

**A grounded theory case study.** A retrospective grounded theory case study was used to generate a theory about the process of developing and implementing UNL’s new Achievement-Centered Education program. Instead of defining it as a methodology, Stake (1995) sees case study as an object of study that is bounded by time and space. Creswell (2007) adds that a case study involves multiple sources of information such as interviews, documents, and reports, in order to report a case description. This study was an instrumental case study in which the case itself was less important than the understanding of the process of general education reform at a research-extensive university from the faculty perspective (Stake, 1995).

**The case.** This instrumental case study is bounded by space and time in that it involved faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who were aware of or involved in the development, adoption, and implementation of ACE. While the review of UNL’s previous essential studies program began the spring/summer of 2003, broad faculty involvement did not begin until the fall of 2005 (“A Brief History,” 2009). Therefore, this case study was bounded by faculty who became aware of or were involved in UNL’s
general education reform from fall 2005 through fall of 2009 (first semester of ACE was implemented).

The grounded theory. The purpose of grounded theory is to “move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a process” (Creswell 2007, p. 63). The theory that emerged helped explain how general education reform occurred at UNL and provided a framework for additional research. The researcher systematically generated a theory complete with a diagram and theoretical propositions grounded in the data derived by in-depth interviews. Participants were chosen strategically so that the researcher could best form the theory, which is known as theoretical sampling (Creswell, 2007). The analysis of the data occurred in three stages, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. At the end, the researcher provided a storyline connecting the categories and proposed a substantive-level theory about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

As a faculty member in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications I have been actively involved in UNL’s general education reform and therefore bring a strong interest in the process of ACE to this study. I was not involved in the conception of ACE but rather in the implementation phase. I first became aware of UNL’s general education reform as a faculty member and later as a Senator representing the advertising sequence in the Faculty Senate and Faculty Senate Executive Committee, where the discussion of ACE took center stage. Later, I was appointed by the Dean as representative of my college on the interim ACE committee (iACE), where I was one of eight faculty
members representing each of the undergraduate colleges. We reviewed 472 ACE course proposals over the course of 18 months, which resulted in discussions about which courses would/could count as one of the 10 student learning outcomes, how these courses address students’ opportunities to learn and demonstrate the outcome(s), and how the course would be assessed. The discussions brought up some issues that have been at the core ACE from the beginning. For example, some college’s iACE representatives displayed strong feelings of territoriality, not accepting the fact that any college could offer general education courses as long as those courses would give students a legitimate opportunity to learn the outcome and commit to assessing student achievement of the outcome on a regular basis. Serving on the iACE committee sparked my curiosity about faculty perceptions of ACE and became the reason why I decided to study this phenomenon in depth.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Theoretical sampling was used to select participants for the study. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define theoretical sampling as “data gathering driven by concepts derived from evolving theory that is based on the concept of ‘making comparisons,’ whose purpose is to go to places, people, or events that maximize opportunities to discover variations among concepts and densify categories in terms of the properties and dimensions” (p. 201). Theoretical sampling occurs at various stages throughout the grounded theory process.

**Site selection.** The first level of theoretical sampling involved the selection of the site for the study. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln was selected for this study because
it was one of 16 universities and colleges that the AAC&U selected to participate in the Greater Expectations Consortium on Quality Education. The initiative exposed key leaders from UNL to new ways of thinking about undergraduate education, which resulted in the development and implementation of a modern general education program focused on student learning and “continuous improvement of the campus learning environment” (Kean et al., 2008).

**Sample and participant selection.** The second level of theoretical sampling involved the selection of the participants. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that theoretical sampling is a process of sampling individuals that can contribute to the open and axial coding. Therefore, this study started with a homogenous sample of faculty who have all experienced the process of ACE. All of them had the opportunity to vote on the implementation of ACE and some of them were teaching an ACE course. The goal was to select individuals from each of the eight colleges to have a wide representation of faculty. The researcher approached members of the interim ACE committee that was charged with populating the new program as well as course facilitators from each college, who helped faculty develop course proposals during the implementation of ACE, and asked them to identify faculty in their respective colleges who had an interest in ACE and could speak about their experiences with the reform process (both positive and negative). The initial sample consisted of 84 individuals that were identified and invited by the researcher by email to participate in the study. Many of the faculty that were approached indicated that they did not know enough about ACE and the reform process and decided not to participate, while others did not reply to the initial invitation or follow-up invitation. The researcher did not specifically ask the prospective participants who
declined the invitation why they opted not to participate in the study. However, it should be noted that UNL had been engaged in extensive budget cuts while ACE was developed, adopted, and implemented. It is possible that those prospects who decided not to participate were uncomfortable sharing their opinions as part of this study. As with all qualitative studies that use rich, thick descriptions and direct quotes to illustrate emerging themes, complete confidentiality of participants’ identities could not be guaranteed.

Although the sample included faculty of all academic ranks as well as those who had a partial administrative appointment (see Table 1 for characteristics of participants), 26 out of the 29 participants were tenured. Those faculty who did agree to participate often served on their department’s or college’s curriculum committee. Some were department chairs and others either had a strong personal interested in general education and/or undergraduate teaching.

Secondly, after developing the initial theory, the researcher added a heterogeneous sample that included individuals who were more actively involved in developing and implementing ACE by serving on a committee such as the GEAC, GEPT, the Faculty Senate, the University Curriculum Committee, or the Academic Planning Committee. Ten of the 29 participants had served on one or more of the ACE committees and were able to speak at length about the process. The reason for including both a homogenous and heterogeneous sample is to determine the contextual and intervening conditions under which the theory holds (Creswell, 2007).

**Forms of data.** In grounded theory, the majority of the data comes from in-depth interviews with participants, while other data forms, such as participant observation and researcher reflection (memoing) may also be used to help develop the theory (Creswell,
The primary form of data in this study consisted of one-on-one interviews with 29 faculty who were involved in one way or another in the ACE process. Overall, this study generated 29 hours and 33 minutes of interview data. The average interview was about one hour long, ranging from 22 minutes to one hour and 51 minutes.

**Interviewing procedures.** The participants were recruited with an email message that explained the purpose and procedures of the study and introduced the researcher (Appendix C). The researcher followed up with a phone call if she did not hear back from faculty. Once a faculty member agreed to participate, the researcher set up an appointment with the participant in his or her office to conduct the interview. An interview protocol was developed consisting of a set of 20 initial open-ended questions that helped answer the central research question and sub-questions (Appendix D). The set of discussion questions served as guiding questions during the open coding stage but additional questions evolved as the interviewing process continued and the study moved into the axial and selective coding stages (Creswell, 2007). Several days before the interview, the researcher sent a summary of the types of questions that would be discussed during the interview to the participant so that he or she could form an opinion about them beforehand. When the researcher arrived for the interview, she explained the purpose and procedures of the study and obtained written informed consent from the participant, who also received a copy of the informed consent form for his or her files (Appendix E). Participants were asked for permission to audio-record the discussion prior to the interview. If a participant did not want the interview to be audio-recorded, the researcher would not have recorded it. However, all participants agreed to have their interview audio-recorded. During each interview the researcher took extensive notes so
that she could refer back to previous statements and ask questions to clarify certain responses. She also made quick notations in the margins to note particularly relevant responses. After the interview the researcher used the memoing technique to record thoughts in a journal, including impressions, observations, reflections, and interpretations. Memoing became an important part in the development of the theory (Creswell, 2007). The researcher continued to collect data until each emerging category was saturated and variation in the data was understood and addressed.

A hired transcriptionist, who signed a confidentiality agreement, transcribed the digital audio files verbatim. An alias was assigned to each participant so that the transcriptionist was never confronted with the participant’s real name unless he or she stated her/his name during the interview. The transcripts were reviewed so that open, axial, and selective coding could begin. The researcher also kept a notebook to record emerging categories and to start developing the emerging theory.

**Data Analysis and Coding Procedures**

**Grounded theory methodology.** Grounded theory requires several different stages of data analysis, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The researcher started with open coding, systematically forming categories of information about the process of ACE from a faculty perspective. In open coding the researcher developed categories of information, axial coding connected the categories, and selective coding created a “storyline” that connected the coding and the categories (Creswell, 2007). The goal was is to elicit a substantive-level theory that emerged from the data with the help of memoing and constant comparison. Constant comparison is the process of
taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories.

Memoing is the process of writing down ideas about the evolving theory through the different stages of data analysis (Creswell, 2007).

**Computer analysis.** The coding and analysis of 29 hours and 33 minutes worth of transcriptions was facilitated by MaxQDA, a qualitative text analysis software that allowed the researcher to efficiently build a hierarchical code/category system that could quickly be changed or adjusted. It also let the researcher keep track of emerging ideas and concepts by writing and attaching memos to codes, categories, and sets of texts.

**Open coding.** In the first phase of analysis the researcher examined the interview transcriptions and created categories for the data. During the interview and transcription process, she took extensive notes (“memoing”), which helped to discover the initial set of categories. As more interviews were conducted, she saturated each category until no new ones were needed to code all of the data. Each category had several subcategories and properties that represented multiple perspectives about the categories, which helped to dimensionalize each category. The properties included extreme possibilities on a continuum (Creswell, 2007). This process reduced the database to a smaller set of categories that describe the process of ACE.

**Axial coding.** In axial coding the data were assembled in new ways and a central category about the process of ACE was identified. Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend using six prescribed categories in this phase of analysis that were also reflected in the sub-questions: causal conditions, the phenomenon, contextual and intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. The central category that was selected was extensively discussed by the participants and appeared to be central to the process of ACE. This
particular category was positioned as the central phenomenon of the study and the other existing categories were reassembled to show how they related to or explained the central category of the theory. The researcher developed a diagram that depicts the central category, as well as causal conditions that influence the ACE process, specific strategies that resulted from the ACE process, as well as intervening and contextual conditions (broad and narrow conditions) that influenced the process of general education reform at UNL (Creswell, 2007). This is how the grounded theory was generated.

Selective coding. In selective coding, the researcher wrote a “storyline” that connects the categories, offering a set of theoretical propositions that state the relationships among them. The result of this study was a substantive-level theory that explains the process of ACE from a faculty perspective.

Methods for Verification

Qualitative researchers suggest that the standards by which quantitative studies are judged are quite inappropriate for judging the quality of qualitative studies (Agar, 1996; Merriam, 1988; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Guba, 1981). For example, the concept of reproducibility (replication) in quantitative studies means that a new study should reproduce the same findings as the original and thereby lend credibility to the original findings if conducted under the same circumstances. This standard is difficult to apply to qualitative research, which usually explores a social phenomenon that is unique in nature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, if the same general rules for data gathering and analysis are followed in qualitative research, and similar conditions exist as in the original study, the qualitative researcher should derive very similar theoretical
explanations about the phenomenon, although they may offer different conceptualizations and emphasize other aspects of the phenomenon under investigation.

Another standard that has different connotations is the concept of generalizability. The purpose of a grounded theory study is to build substantive theory that speaks directly to specific populations. This approach emphasizes the concept of explanatory power of the specific phenomenon – in this case general education reform at UNL – as opposed to generalizing findings about a larger, more general theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Although quantitative methods for data verification such as reliability and generalizability cannot be applied in qualitative research, other standards do exist that ensure internal validity (Creswell, 2007).

1. Triangulation of multiple sources of data. Triangulation can be defined as the process of relating different sources of data and using it to build a “coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 196). The primary source of data consisted of interview data but the researcher also consulted secondary data, such as materials published by the Office of Undergraduate Studies about ACE. The secondary data were used to substantiate the participants’ accounts of what happened and to confirm emerging findings.

2. Member checks. Member checking is the process of establishing accuracy of the findings by taking the final report or emerging themes back to the participants and determining whether they believe they are accurate. The researcher provided the participants with the theoretical paradigm that emerged during axial coding, as well as a set of theoretical propositions, and included their comments to complete this task. Eleven of the 29 participants responded to the invitation to review the materials.
Three of them indicated that the representation of findings seemed accurate but that they disagreed with the opinions of their colleagues. One participant had no recollection of a failed attempt to fix the previous general education program and another participant did not remember that funding had been promised. One participant commented in depth about theoretical propositions 1.2, 1.3, 2.2 and 7.1.

a. Proposition 1.2 dealt with the cyclical nature of the reform process. The participant agreed that it was cyclical but that it did not necessarily require a new reform at the end. Instead of resulting in another reform process, he suggested that the process could simply result in renewal.

b. Proposition 1.3 states that, from the faculty perspective, the call for change was driven by administration. The participant pointed out that change itself must be driven by administrators as they are “leaders and catalysts.” Instead of driving the call for change, he agrees that administrators drive the change itself. He agreed with the statement that reform driven entirely by faculty is inefficient.

c. Proposition 2.2 related the level of faculty buy-in (to the process) to their academic rank. The participant suggested that faculty buy-in is more related to the faculty member’s discipline (humanities versus sciences in particular) as opposed to academic rank.

d. Proposition 7.1 suggested that funding (or lack thereof) is related to the quality of education, accountability, sustainability, and marketability of the program. The participant pointed out that funding to teach general education
courses will always be made available because general education courses generate revenue for the university.

3. Rich, thick description. The findings about the process of ACE was conveyed in categories and themes and illustrated with thick, rich verbatim detail of the participants’ accounts of what happened.

4. Clarification of researcher’s bias. Potential bias on the researcher’s part was discussed in the section “Role of the Researcher.”

5. Reporting negative or discrepant information. In qualitative research, discrepant information that runs counter to the emerging themes and theory should be presented because “real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Therefore, this study discussed negative/discrepant information because it lends credibility to the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

**Open Coding**

The open coding categories were developed after coding the first ten transcripts of interviews with the participants and by consulting the field notes of those interviews. This technique allowed the researcher to study a portion of the data with the purpose of developing a series of initial categories that would eventually contain all of the data. The categories generated were: *history, process, change agents, communication, involvement,* and *environment.*

These categories were initially used as coding of the next interviews continued and eventually collapsed into five categories as more data were analyzed. Some of the initial categories were combined into broader, more inclusive categories and an additional category emerged from the data. Since *history* dealt primarily with the previous general education program at UNL that was replaced by ACE, it was incorporated into the *process* category as a property. The categories *change agents* and *involvement* were collapsed into one category and renamed *influencers.* This category now includes subcategories that describe the role certain individuals and groups played during the reform process and that were initially included in the *process* category. The researcher decided that the data called for a separate category to analyze the distinct differences among individuals and groups and how they influenced the process. As more interviews were coded and analyzed it became clear that the previous category, *communication* should be incorporated into the *process* category. Participants primarily spoke about the
communication process during the designing the program phase, so it became a property in that particular sub-category. The category environment was not changed but two new categories were added. Participants spoke extensively about the benefits and challenges of the new program and compared ACE to CEP, which became sub-categories of the effects category. They also described their feelings during the process of developing, adopting, and implementing ACE, which became another category. This constant comparison took place as new data were added, which was an important part of the grounded theory process. The categories that were in place after coding all of the interviews were: process, environment, influencers, feelings, and effects (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Open Coding Categories**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub-Category</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
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<td>Process</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>CEP</td>
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<td>Call for change</td>
<td>Decision</td>
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<td>Purpose</td>
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<td>Representation</td>
<td>Faculty – administration</td>
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<td>Expertise</td>
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<td>Role of individuals</td>
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<td>Faculty buy-in</td>
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<td>Vote</td>
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<td>Revision</td>
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<td>Institutional Culture</td>
<td>Mission of university</td>
<td>Res. focus – teaching focus</td>
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<td>Ease-of-Use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>ACE vs. CEP</td>
<td>Similar – different</td>
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**Process.** At the heart of each interview was a description of the different phases of the process of general education reform from the perspective of the participants, including sub-categories such as the history of general education at UNL, the call for change in light of the previous general education program at UNL, the committee structure of the main committees that developed ACE, the purpose of general education reform, designing the program, adopting the program, and certification of courses to
populate the program. Not every participant remembered all of the different phases of
general education reform as neatly as they are described here. Rather, individual
participants remembered some of the sub-categories in more detail than others, depending
on their involvement in the reform process. For example, those participants who served
on the Faculty Senate were able to recall the early stages of development, whereas most
participants who served on their department’s curriculum committees remembered the
adoption and certification stages in more detail. One participant who had served on the
Faculty Senate Executive Committee said,

I decided to run for the executive committee and to focus on making this
process more faculty inclusive and more transparent and certainly more
open to ideas at all stages of the process, not just at the beginning and the
end.

The first sub-category was history of general education at UNL. Participants
commented in detail about UNL’s previous general education program known as the
Comprehensive Education Program (CEP) that was developed and implemented in the
mid-nineties. The program consisted of two components: essential studies (ES) and
integrative studies (IS). Students were required to take 27 credit hours across eight areas
of knowledge, including communication; mathematics and statistics; human behavior,
culture, and social organization; science and technology; historical studies; humanities;
and race, ethnicity and gender. Integrative studies was defined as “UNL’s experience
requirement” and consisted of 30 credit hours of coursework that would engage students
in abilities and desires: critical thinking, writing, oral expression, analysis of
controversies, exploration of assumptions; inquiry through course content into the

When asked whether general education reform at UNL was necessary, most participants responded that CEP needed to be replaced because the system was not working. The main problem of CEP was that it had become too complicated and “unwieldy” to manage for both students and faculty. The list of approved courses had reached several thousand but not all of those courses counted as general education courses in every college because every college decided which courses would count in which area. One participant said that CEP was “hijacked by the colleges.” The non-transferability of courses made it difficult for students who wanted to switch majors and graduate in a timely manner. Many of them were forced to take additional courses in order to meet the general education requirements, postponing their graduation as the IS/ES portion of their curriculum encompassed a total of 57 credit hours. Some participants theorized that the complexity of UNL’s general education program “was driving students away,” but realized that this assertion would be difficult to prove.

Another major problem with CEP was that none of the approved courses were systematically assessed or evaluated to ensure that each course actually covered what it was intended to cover. This was especially problematic for the IS component, which required that students learn specific skills such as critical thinking and writing. Once a course was taught by a different faculty member, many of the IS requirements were ignored and not necessarily taught.

However, a few participants indicated that CEP was good and did not need to be changed. They especially liked the IS component:
I loved the ideas behind [CEP]. I loved the commitment behind it. I loved the pressure it put on the campus to have writing instruction in classes. I loved the way you would have something like a written communication course, then you would have writing intensive courses periodically because that is what integrative studies was supposed to be and in some ways it was writing intensive.

Some faculty felt strongly that instead of deciding to create a new general education program from scratch, CEP could have been fixed by adding an assessment layer to it. In fact, before it was decided that UNL would start to design a completely new general education program, the Faculty Senate appointed an ad hoc committee to try to improve the existing program. However, the proposal was turned down by the Senior Vice Chancellor and soon after the Chancellor called for a brand-new general education program. At the same time, most of the participants agreed with the Chancellor that it was the right decision to start over because it would have been impossible to add an assessment layer to CEP because the courses that had been approved were taught completely differently compared to what the course description indicated.

The second sub-category dealt with the call for change. Who decided that general education reform was necessary? Who initiated the process? And what would be the purpose of a new general education program that would replace CEP entirely? Participants generally offered three different scenarios. Most of them indicated that the decision to design a new program from scratch was a “top-down approach” initiated by the Chancellor. Some participants were convinced that faculty were driving the call for change, and stated that unless the process was faculty-driven, they would not have voted for it. Interestingly, quite a few participants simply could not remember exactly who
drove the process and had not actively thought about it. One participant from Fine & Performing Arts said,

> If feel that even if [the Chancellor] said that we are doing this, there was so much discussion among faculty I felt like, ‘okay, this is going to be done but at least we get to have input.’

The second property under call for change was purpose. Participants had varying opinions about the purpose of the new general education program, including the attempt to make general education at UNL more attractive to students, which in turn would result in student recruitment and retention. Some participants were aware of North Central Accreditation’s assessment mandates and believed that ACE was a direct response to it. Other participants, especially those who had been at UNL for a long time, simply thought that an institution’s general education program should be “re-evaluated” and “re-shuffled” from time to time to ensure it is still working.

Committee structure was another sub-category under process and included the properties leadership, representation, and focus. Participants discussed how the two committees that worked on the “nuts and bolts” of the new program were selected and why, who they represented (faculty, administration, students), and what their focus was. The most significant property was leadership, which later on in the coding procedures emerged as an important contextual condition. One participant from Arts & Sciences said, “The presence of one or two well respected individuals to take a leadership role is absolutely critical.”

One of the most dominant sub-categories was designing the program, which included the properties communication, comparisons, expertise, and role of participants. Participants appreciated the many forms of communication about ACE, including open
forums, E-mail updates, and an up-to-date Web site with minutes of meetings that could be accessed publically. They also spoke about the two-way communication between GEAC/GEPT committee members and their respective departments and colleges, which generally worked well in departments that had representatives on the committee and not so well in departments that did not have representatives on the committee. “The communication through their representatives was very effective. Those were very effective,” said one participant from Arts & Sciences. On the other hand, as one participant from Education & Human Sciences said, “I think communication was almost entirely electronic. I mean, I didn’t speak much with our ACE [representative], our liaison.”

Participants also compared the process of designing a general education program at UNL, which is a large, research-extensive institution, to recent reform efforts at smaller, liberal arts colleges. They spoke about the expertise of the committee members to develop an “educationally sound” new program that was rooted in the latest general education trends. Finally, it became clear that certain individuals had important roles in driving the development phase forward and those individuals were not limited to the committee members. Deans and department chairs as well as several administrators and key faculty appeared to influence the direction of ACE during the development and adoption phase. One participant from Architecture described the power of deans as follows:

I remember when we finally approved the proposals there was one college that had not approved it and it was one of the ways the dean had presented it to us that we wanted to be on the side of the people who were supporting this. I think if a college didn’t approve this it wasn’t going to go through
and we really didn’t want to be known as the ones that were keeping it from happening.

Adopting the program was another sub-category with the properties timeline, faculty buy-in, vote and revisions. It should be noted here that most faculty that were approached to participate in this study indicated they did not know much about the reform process in general and ACE in particular. The ones that did participate were mostly personally interested in general education and many of them served either on curriculum committees or were heavily involved in teaching and advising. This sub-category describes the process that was needed to phase out CEP and to implement ACE. Participants spoke in great detail about the aggressive timeline that started when the call for change first occurred, through the development phase and into the adoption of ACE. Most of them indicated that there simply was not enough time to develop a “truly innovative” program that would entirely be developed by faculty. As one participant from Arts & Sciences said, “I think we could have had some more realistic timelines to get people involved and certainly more time to think through how we were going to assess these things.”

Some of the participants knew that ACE was designed with the AAC&U’s LEAP framework in mind. They felt that their voices were not heard during open forums to truly discuss what would be best for students. The timeline appeared to be problematic again during the adoption phase of the program because faculty felt that there was not enough time to “tweak the program.” Revision of the ACE program emerged as a property because participants from Arts & Sciences described how, after a failed vote on the first two proposals, initiated an ad hoc committee that would recommend changes to the initial
set of proposals. *Faculty buy-in* was another important property in this sub-category, which developed into another contextual condition during the axial coding process and is discussed in more detail in that particular section.

After the colleges voted to accept ACE as the new general education program along with four governing documents, it was time to populate it by certifying courses that would count in up to two of the 10 student learning outcomes of ACE. Although the initial goal of this study was to only focus on the development and adoption of ACE, almost all of the participants brought up their experiences with the certification process even though they were not prompted. Most of the frustration came from the electronic submission site:

[The submission experience] ranged from nightmarish to okay. There were a lot of technical problems with submitting the proposals at first. One person in my department, who is a very sophisticated computer user, lost many hours of work. I must say that we had terrific help from the administrative staff who was working with us but there were some real frustrating moments.

Most of these participants were not very active during the development phase of ACE but were able to share their experiences with the certification process of courses to populate ACE after it had been adopted. This sub-category included the following properties: *strategies, submission of course proposals, expertise of interim ACE (iACE) committee members, time commitment, leadership, and collegiality.*

**Environment.** The category *environment* consisted of three sub-categories, including *institutional culture, politics, and definitions.* *Institutional culture* included properties such as the institution’s *governing structure,* the *type of organization* and its level of *collegiality,* the *mission of the university, faculty and student identities,* and
financial resources. How are decisions typically made at this particular university? Did the general education reform process adhere to the governance structure that was in place? How did the mission of the university align with the goals of the new general education program and how would the new program be supported? Participants reflected on those issues and recognized how the answers to those questions would impact the success rate of the new program. One participant from Arts & Sciences said, “I think [ACE] has pitted us against other departments with whom we once had friendly cooperative relationships but now we are in a competition that we were not in before.” Another participant from Arts & Sciences saw it the opposite way, “People were really concerned about turf wars but as Arts & Sciences representative on the curriculum committee it seems pretty clear to me that the new general education requirement has increased, not decrease, the collegiality between the colleges.”

Politics was another sub-category that emerged. Its properties include the economic climate before, during, and after the reform process, as well as external and internal politics. Participants pointed out that many faculty were under the impression that the administration had promised financial resources in support of ACE, which became one of the main reasons departments decided to have their courses ACE-certified. Internal politics dealt with internal competition for funding, which participants generally perceived to be tied to student credit hour production. External politics was a property that referred to the discussion of transfer courses from different institutions and the fact that those courses did not have to adhere to any kind of assessment.

The third property in this sub-category includes a variety of different definitions of general education from a faculty perspective. Some participants described general
education as “empowerment” because it changes how students see themselves. Especially in an outcomes-based general education program students might focus on what they have learned instead of the grade they received. Most of the participants agreed that general education is moving toward the requirement of skills instead of a “buffet” of courses in a variety of different subjects:

I think we are moving towards a view in which general education is thought of in terms of skills that students have acquired rather than subjects they’ve studied. The reason is that technology and culture are growing at such a pace that there is an enormous change in what is reasonable to expect a person to know as you age.

However, not everyone agreed that it should be based on measurable outcomes. “It seems to me that we have always done assessment. We call it grading, […] I think the focus has shifted from what students are doing to what faculty are doing.” Ultimately, participants agreed that general education should provide students with the knowledge and skills to become educated individuals. Most participants were able to define general education in some way.

Influencers. Another major category that emerged during open coding was influencers. The subcategories included a variety of different individuals and groups that influenced the reform process in one way or another. One of the largest sub-categories was administration, which included influential participants such as the Chancellor, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and the Admissions Office. Most participants indicated that the Chancellor, not faculty, decided that UNL’s general education program would undergo a complete reform process. Participants often used the term “top down approach” to describe how the reform process was started. One participant from Arts &
Sciences said, “[The Chancellor] decided that he wanted a new general education program. This was not something that rose out of the faculty.”

The properties in this sub-category include the different *roles* in which the participants placed the administration. Some saw the administration as a *leader* in the reform process in that it provided the framework, while faculty developed the actual program. Another participant from Business Administration said that the reform process was driven by financial reasons. “I think it was driven by admissions, by finances broadly conceived, not by any educational goals.” A participant from Arts & Sciences commented that the Admissions Office should never have been represented on the GEAC/GEPT committees and that its involvement raised red flags. “There was no reason for someone from the Admissions Office to be on that committee. They don’t really deal with education. This is not just about what we think would be for our students’ education.” Other properties in this sub-category include *provider*, which describes the extent to which the administration supported the reform process, *visionary*, which is a discussion about the insights administrators brought to the reform process, their overall *presence* in the reform process, as well as its role as *facilitator*. One participant from Arts & Sciences put *visionary* and *facilitator* into context: “I think the process of forming committees and getting the work started was administration-driven but I think shaping the program and the commitment to go through with it was faculty-driven.”

Another important sub-category was *faculty*, which included the properties *leader, supporter, facilitator, visionary*, and *promoter*. One of the themes that emerged was that, although many faculty showed up to the open forums to discuss the development of ACE, most faculty on campus chose not to participate. As one participant
form Arts & Sciences observed, “The process of creating a new general education program was mostly done by the people who were appointed to do that and a small number of people who took a personal interest in it.” One participant cited research that shows that only 15 percent of college faculty are going to be involved in teaching issues at a university. Almost all of the participants indicated that faculty had “ample opportunities” to get involved in ACE and have their concerns and suggestions heard. Most still chose not to get involved. The main reason for faculty’s lack of participation in general education reform that was mentioned most frequently was that faculty were being pulled into too many different directions. At a large research-extensive university like UNL, faculty are primarily concerned with producing research and when forced to make a decision of how to spend their time, they usually choose research. Those faculty who participated in the process without having been appointed by their Deans to serve on an ACE committee, were vocal about their opinions. One participant from the social sciences explained the reason why some faculty are very much engaged in the process:

    Especially in sciences and social sciences it’s our job to pick apart whatever is on the table, and even if you agree with it you just pick it apart and you test hypotheses and you question data and the whole nine yards. A very skeptical group of people. That’s just the nature of who we are.

    However, some participants described the two initial ACE committees as “insulated” and “not open” to the public. They said that their suggestion and comments were often “ignored.” To some, the Faculty Senate became a deliberative body that would give faculty an opportunity to have their voices heard and to be more informed about the reform process as it unfolded. Some of the participants became leaders and at times promoters of the reform process, especially those that had served on the Faculty
Senate when the proposals were discussed. Senators were generally the ones who had become aware of the general education reform process first and who took an interest in it even though they were not officially serving on an ACE committee. One participant indicated that he ran for the Senate Executive Committee for the sole reason of being in the loop about ACE.

The opportunity for the general faculty to interact with the process of designing general education came through the Faculty Senate. I was on the Faculty Senate at the time and decided, based on this issue, to run for the executive committee and make my focus on the executive committee to make the process [of general education reform] more faculty inclusive, more transparent, and certainly more open to ideas at all stages of the process. Not just at the very beginning and the very end but during the discussion process when things were being formulated and over the course of the second year.

The Faculty Senate was perceived by some participants an important catalyst for change because of the knowledge and expertise of the Senators as well as the various Presidents. Faculty trusted these individuals. “I viewed [the President of the Faculty Senate] as an important person who was aware of similar systems around the country. The IS/ES system was outdated and needed to be updated and I never really questioned that.” One former Senate Executive Committee member explained that the Senate was very influential in helping to get the new program passed. He said that in the first year of development the administration’s “official position” was to keep the Senate out of the reform process, whereas in the second year, the GEAC/GEPT committees approached the Executive Committee to share what they were thinking about doing and to get input from a variety of faculty. “I think the program improved because of it and I’m not sure it would have passed if they hadn’t done it.” In terms of helping to pass the program, the
Faculty Senate insisted on voting on the program before it went to the colleges to give it the appearance of a “faculty program.”

It’s true that faculty on campus don’t necessarily feel that the Senate is their representative vehicle […], but it was the only opportunity for faculty belonging to all the different colleges to combine together in a discussion aside from the people who wrote the proposals. So it had some meaning even though the [Faculty Senate] vote didn’t necessarily matter.

The Faculty Senate also appeared to play an important role in getting the program approved because as a deliberative body it was a place where faculty could openly and regularly debate general education so that faculty could get more interested in the topic and become more involved. They then went back to their colleges and reported on the reform process, which participants said, “made a difference in those individuals’ colleges’ votes that were needed to pass the program.” Several participants mentioned that their Senators’ role in the process was two-fold. They would report what was discussed during the Senate meetings, but would also report their departments’ concerns and ideas back to the Senate so that their constituents’ voices could be heard.

Another sub-category of influencers was colleges. The eight undergraduate colleges were enormously influential in the reform process because they each had to approve the program or it would not have passed. Participants described the strategies and voting procedures in their respective colleges and at times commented on other colleges as well. The college that had most “at stake” was Arts & Sciences. Some faculty vividly recalled the voting process, while others could not remember whether they voted on the proposals. The first set of proposals was tabled, which resulted in the creation of an Arts & Sciences ad hoc committee to revise them. The college then voted on the revised proposals and passed them. The College of Architecture also did not approve the
first set of proposals, which resulted in a strong message by the administration to reconsider. The proposals were finally approved and the process moved forward.

Closely related to this sub-category was the sub-category Deans. As chief academic officers of each college in a decentralized governing structure, Deans appeared to play a very important role in the reform process. Participants described their Dean’s role ranging from facilitators to leaders. Some Deans were not actively involved in trying to push a vote in favor of the new general education program or ensuring that their colleges would put enough courses forward for certification. “He does everything in his power to create the mechanism for discussion and for voting but he keeps his own opinions out. […] He is meticulous between the separation of his role as a facilitator and any way he is trying to impose his own agenda.”

However, others appeared to be more “hands-on” and “guiding” the faculty of their colleges to vote for the adoption of ACE and to participate in the new program by having courses ACE certified. “The Dean asked, which means she ‘ordered,’ every department to put forward ACE courses and my chair then said we have to put forward courses.” In another college the Dean openly urged the faculty to vote in favor of ACE after the faculty had an opportunity to digest the proposals. “[We were told that] each college across campus was going to vote on this. Our Dean encouraged us to vote a certain way and he said that if we don’t vote this in, we’ll be the only ones on campus who don’t do it. And we don’t want to be in that position. And it was not discussed at length at the faculty meeting at which there was the vote.” Another participant from the same college added, “our Dean wanted to please the Chancellor who was pushing for a quick and painless adoption of ACE.” This sentiment was echoed by participants from
other colleges, who said, “the message the Dean’s Office got [from the administration] was that if this doesn’t pass, we’ll just impose it anyway.”

In addition to colleges and Deans, departments and department chairs also played in important role in the reform process. As the largest traditional provider of general education courses, the faculty of Arts & Sciences had different levels of involvement. For example, it appeared that the English department was very active in the development, adoption, and implementation phase of ACE because some of the faculty recognized the implications for the program:

This is a really big department and I think a lot of people didn’t pay any attention to [general education reform] initially. The English department has always been a big player in general education not in terms of its positions and its philosophical commitment and also in terms of student credit hour production. So we kept taking it to the faculty during our meetings because it didn’t make any sense not to. So I think some faculty became more aware of it because the chair and vice chair of the department kept bringing it up.

While the English department was actively trying to get more faculty involved in the open forums and other discussions of general education reform, the history department, also traditionally an important provider of general education courses, chose not to engage in the process early on.

No one in our department knew what the ACE program was and what it entailed, what kind of changes it would require. They didn’t put any attention into the planning of it. They did not go to the meetings that discussed it, they did not pay any attention to what impact it would have on student enrollment and I think that we were blind-sided by it. Honestly.

Generally, it appears that department chairs were more involved in the process than their faculty, especially in Arts & Sciences. One participant explained this as follows:
I think there’s a culture of allowing chairs to take responsibility for these things. The chairs discussed and raised objections but when it came time for the actual Arts and Sciences meeting to vote, people didn’t show up. I’m not quite sure that they understand that their vote actually counts. There is a culture now of being primarily concerned with one’s own research, one’s own professional development and less with the curriculum, the students, and their education.

The last sub-category was characteristics of influencers, which was a catch-all category of attributes of leaders as described by the participants. Whether the influencer was an administrator or a faculty member, participants described their qualities and why they were so influential. For example, they tend to have a “can-do attitude” and the ability to spot a problem and act on it. They also saw influencers as individuals who can see the big picture instead of detail-oriented work:

It is important to be able to abstract a key issue out of a mass of detail. It’s really helpful to have people who are really good at seeing which points are critical and while points are less important.

Another participant added the following:

It helps to have people who are able to take a broad view rather than a parochial view. Whenever I am thinking about policy issues I try to make a distinction between my particular role versus what I see as being in the group’s best interest.

Integrity was an important property in this sub-category:

We needed to have representation on each committee that would be able to stand up and say, ‘I object and I will vote no.’ [These individuals] needed to know exactly what they were doing so that the colleges could retain their power.

Several participants recognized that it was important to have a few well-respected and well-rounded individuals on committees who can drive the process forward. A former chair of one of the main ACE committees said this:
I was known among the faculty as a provider. Nobody in my department pays any attention to it, but outside this department there were people who knew about my books and knew there was some breadth of interest there.

The participants spoke about those faculty who were involved in the reform process as highly motivated, hard working, and extremely bright.

He is a really bright human being and level-headed and sweet. He kept us abreast [of the process] at college faculty meeting. He convinced us with his personality and the fact that we trusted him that is was going to be okay for us and okay for other colleges.

Participants also described committee members as effective communicators:

Change agents are individuals that become really important in terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication, from one committee to the next, back to their colleges, as representatives of the Faculty Senate. Certain individuals are very much involved in this process and helped drive the process.

**Feelings.** The *feelings* category consisted of five sub-categories, including *expectations, frustrations, trust/distrust, comfort and security, and fear and anxiety.* In the *expectations* sub-category, participants talked about expectations they had of themselves as well as others during the reform process. Most of the participants indicated that they had enough opportunities to get involved in the process but chose not to because they had too many other responsibilities. One participant from Arts & Sciences felt that the aggressive timeline of the reform process did not allow enough time to get prepared. Another participant from Arts & Sciences who was chair of her department’s undergraduate studies said the following:

I don’t think this faculty were involved enough in this whole process and I include myself in this. It was a little bit of a shock for me to realize that I was suddenly going to have to be deeply involved in this process as chair of undergraduate studies and I had not been paying sufficient attention
along the way to the development of the new undergraduate program so I hold myself responsible as well for not being involved enough early on.

Others described themselves as “passionate” about general education and became very much involved in the process. In terms of expectations of others, participants used the term “respectability” and “credibility” to describe those who they expected to make a change. One participant from Arts & Sciences said the following about the chair of the GEAC/GEPT committees:

“I’ve known [him] for many years and I’ve always respected the way he goes about doing things and so the fact that he was kind of leading the charge on this immediately made me more receptive to it than I probably would have been otherwise.

Another sub-category was comfort and security, which manifested itself in the properties of assessment and student learning.” Participants expressed comfort in knowing that ACE might be easier to understand and navigate for students. “All of the things that make it beneficial for student make it good for us.” At the same time, there appeared to be a sense of security and honesty in terms of knowing that an ACE course will actually deliver what it is intended to deliver because of the assessment component. However, participants also said that faculty may feel insecure and uncomfortable. “When you start making proposals to change what people have been living with for a number of years, everybody seems to be concerned about ‘are we going to experience any losses?’ Changes are always a little bit frightening.”

Participants’ feelings ranged from feeling insecure about the new program to expressing fear and anxiety, which was another sub-category. Especially the participants from Arts & Sciences explained that faculty were worried about how ACE would affect student credit hour production and this fear was the reason why most faculty voted
against ACE at first. “The initial no vote was motivated by a lot of anxiety that some
departments felt about how their student credit hour production might be jeopardized by
[ACE] and our college’s standing in the university.” The same participant noticed that the
more faculty communicated their fears to their peers, the less emotional they became
about the topic:

There was this initial reluctance but then as people started to talk about it
with a little less emotion that had kind of bubbled up and had subsided,
people were talking about it a little more clearly and I think a lot of the
anxiety went away.

One participant from Business Administration described that faculty experienced
anxiety because of the assessment of ACE courses and predicted that some faculty will
have their courses decertified to avoid having to assess them. “They view it as a really
burdensome thing. If it is a huge pain to do the assessment piece many of them will opt
out of doing it. It will determine whether faculty want to have their courses recertified.”
A participant from Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources explained she is worried
about the coordination of the assessment because they have a lot of adjunct faculty and
graduate teaching assistants teaching their ACE courses. “I would say we are much more
anxious about the logistics than we are actually doing the assessment.”

Another sub-category that was related to fear and anxiety was frustration, which
described participants’ feelings about the certification and implementation phases of
ACE. One issue that caused many faculty to become frustrated occurred during the
population phase when they submitted courses for ACE certification:

I think the problems that we had were primarily with the university ACE
commitee that I don’t think when they went in they had set standards for
what they were looking for and then ended up setting them in a pretty
arbitrary way. It has to do with the way the whole program is conceived. I don’t think it’s the fault of those individuals.

Finally, participants talked in depth about the level of trust in two different entities: the administration and their colleagues who served on the various ACE committees. More specifically, participants expressed trust in their colleagues to “do the right thing” and distrust in the administration because they were questioning the administration’s motivation for general education reform, much of which stemmed from the lack of resources to support ACE. For example, one participant who had been on the Faculty Senate ad hoc committee that was charged with fixing CEP said the following:

“The Chancellor and Senior Vice Chancellor rejected it off hand and I think our former Senior Vice Chancellor wanted to say she did something. We had the proposal [to fix CEP] and it was dismissed. It just disappeared and nobody ever really told me why.”

At the same time, a couple of the participants said that faculty needed to trust the administration to get something accomplished. “If we don’t trust [the Chancellor], then we can sit around and try to write things ‘till we’re blue in the face to constrain him.”

**Effects.** Although at the time the interviews were conducted ACE had only been implemented for a semester, participants were eager to discuss what they believed the program’s benefits and challenges would be in the future. One of the most dominant benefits of ACE as perceived by faculty is the ease-of-use for faculty and students. Limited to 10 student learning outcomes, participants described the new program as “elegant and simple,” “easy to understand,” and “straight-forward.” Another perceived benefit was the transferability of courses among colleges, which makes advising much more effective and efficient:
I think having the advantage to transfer those ACE courses among majors is a huge advantage to students. If you are advising students now you don’t have to worry about an ACE course falling off the list because it’s not approved by a particular college.

Participants also listed ACE’s accountability measure as a benefit. “[ACE] adds an accountability that was largely impossible given the complexities of the CEP program and the variation of one college to the next and terms of how thoroughly engaged in the process they were.” A participant from Arts & Sciences predicted, “I think once faculty quit worrying about assessment so much, then we are going to make progress.” Another participant added, “If the assessment of it plays out, we will eventually have real outcomes.”

Closely related to the accountability property was the accreditation property. Several participants recognized that ACE will help UNL with North Central Accreditation, while at the same time aid the small, professional colleges with their accrediting needs. Participants also enthusiastically spoke about the focus of quality of education and quality of instruction under ACE that was not included in the previous program, specifically the capstone experience and the ethics outcome. In general, participants liked the fact that ACE is outcomes-based, as opposed to the previous program, which was primarily subject-based. “With ACE we’re looking for students to develop competency in certain areas that can be quantified. And with the other program, I don’t know how the other program was developed, frankly. Nobody ever explained structures, so I don’t know.” Participants also spoke positively about ACE’s focus on teaching and student learning. “[ACE] provides a way for us to figure out if we’re
actually teaching the things that we want to be teaching to students or they’re actually learning the things we want them to be learning.”

Several of the participants theorized that one of the reasons ACE was designed the way it was had to do with student enrollment and retention and the overall marketability of the program. As one participant from Arts & Sciences explained:

I think [the administration] wanted a program that they could sell and I don’t blame them for that, honestly. I want us to have a program that we can sell. But I also want a program that is educationally defensible and sound and I think within the constraints that we were working with the program we have has some promise at being increasingly educationally sound.

The other sub-category, challenges includes many of the same properties as the benefits sub-category, but differs in their dimensions. For example, while some participants saw the transferability of ACE courses among colleges as a benefit, other participants cited it as a challenge. One participant from Journalism and Mass Communications said, “The transferability among colleges – I think the Chancellor would view it as one of the valuable outcomes of ACE – is more allusion than reality.” He explained that some colleges decided to add distribution requirements to ACE, which require students to take additional hours across a variety of different subjects, similar to the previous ES system.

Now we’re in a situation where, for instance Astronomy 102 and geography 105 are both on the ACE list. However, if you’re going to be in the Engineering College, taking those courses does you no good because you are still going to take Chemistry 109 and 110. So if you as a freshman were kind of undecided and took Astronomy because it sounded interesting and it was on the list as a science course, that’s fine, it checks off that requirement but it would have been more efficient to have taken Chemistry.
Another challenge participants brought up relating to transferability was the automatic transfer of ACE credit for transfer equivalencies from different institutions without requiring them to assess their courses. While participants recognized that politically UNL would not be able to ask other institutions to show how their transfer equivalencies met ACE student learning outcomes, some participants suggested that the transfer equivalency agreements should be evaluated on a regular basis. “What we can do is to have a review. If our courses have to get recertified every five years, then these equivalencies need to get recertified, too.”

Some of the participants felt strongly that the reduced number of courses of ACE (30 hours as opposed to 57) “lowered the bar” of general education at UNL and resulted in a “net loss.” Others described ACE as “the lowest common denominator” because it only required 30 hours. When comparing ACE to CEP, one participant said, “I think we went from a system that was a little too complex to one much too simple.” Participants were critical both of the lack of skills courses in ACE, as well as the inclusion of some skills courses in the program. One participant from Architecture described the challenge of ACE this way:

The previous program required all students to demonstrate critical thinking skills. It required faculty to think beyond their own particular viewpoint and introducing new points beyond their own as a fundamental part of examining the controversies in that particular area. The new program does not do that in a broad-based way. […] The overall number of courses one has to take to fulfill a requirement was reduced and the segment of the curriculum that was focused on critical thinking has gone away. There are fewer courses, there is less focus on thinking and a higher percentage can be taken by transfer. A big chunk can come from someone else. That is a shaky statement to me.
On the other hand, several participants countered that general education should expose students to a variety of different broad areas:

I’m not convinced that the emphasis on skills that ACE has is necessarily good. Skills are fine but to me that is not the purpose of an education. The purpose of an education is to broadly expose a student to our culture and society […] and that includes humanities, literature, history, languages, math and science, etcetera. And so I think [ACE] is lacking in this. I think some student will get it because of the courses they select, but I think other students won’t. Whereas before students were required to get some exposure in all these fields, now students can avoid that kind of exposure. And I think that that is a loss.

Another major property in this sub-category was support. Almost all of the participants expressed concern of the lack of funding for ACE, which has a direct impact on the quality of the program. Areas of financial support include enough faculty lines to hire the best possible full-time faculty to teach general education courses. In addition, participants said that departments needed additional teaching assistants to help with the coordination of assessment. Participants also believed that the institution should offer workshops for faculty to learn how to assess their courses and how to collect, upload, and analyze their student work samples. Several participants mentioned that the university’s nationally acclaimed Peer Review of Teaching Project could help to prepare faculty for the assessment requirements. One participant from Arts & Sciences said,

We have the Peer Review of Teaching program that is very helpful. I wish we had more. We used to have the Teaching and Learning Center - that was great. I’m all in favor of faculty improving their teaching skills but I think for different disciplines and different individual faculty there are all kinds of different approaches. The notion is that there is a set way to do this. I think that at least my faculty feels that there is big brother looking over your shoulder.

Another challenge that emerged was course, program, and institutional assessment. While several participants described it as a benefit of the ACE program,
other participants saw it as the major challenge of ACE. “I worry about how sustainable all of this [assessment] is and whether it going to be very valuable.” Some participants pointed out that the development of ACE was heavily influenced by the sciences (the chair of the initial GEAC/GEPT committees was a faculty member from the hard sciences), which are typically assessed numerically. However, assessment in the humanities and arts is perceived to be much more challenging. A participant from Education and Human Sciences feared that ACE assessment was not primarily about student learning, saying that, “this is not about encouraging learning. It’s an accountability measure for the Regents and the accrediting entities.”

Another challenge is ACE’s focus on formative assessment instead of summative assessment:

Some faculty see ACE assessment as phony because too much is being done exclusively through products created in the course of a semester or at the end of the semester. Assessment of students is about how much they have retained through their four years here. It is not determined by what you can do at the end of a semester. Sorry.

Some participants, especially department chairs and curriculum/assessment committee chairs expressed their concern about the assessment requirement at the program level. For example, the English department offers ACE courses that are certified in a number of different outcomes, which means that the department has to assess some outcomes every year. “For a department like ours that is spread out across outcomes what this means is that we have general education assessment every year. We never have a year off.” Other properties in the challenges sub-category included the mission of the university, faculty buy-in, and student ownership of the new program.
The third sub-category was *comparison*, where faculty compared the old CEP system with the new ACE system. In this sub-category of effects participants indicated that the two programs are not really all that different with the exception of ACE’s assessment requirement. They described ACE as a “re-categorization” of CEP. Several participants shared their old and new advising sheets during the interviews and showed how the 10 ACE outcomes would fit into the old CEP system. Some participants even doubted that ACE’s assessment component would make a difference. “I don’t think [assessment] is going to make a difference. My colleagues and I are good teachers and so I think there could be ES, there could be ACE, there could be nothing.”

**Axial Coding**

Axial coding is “the process of relating categories to their subcategories and linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). Therefore, the categories, sub-categories, properties and dimensions discovered during open coding were reconstructed into a new format so that new connections could be articulated. The data were placed into a new paradigm, an “analytic tool devised to help integrate structure and process” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). The paradigm during axial coding included causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) the purpose of labeling conditions is to tease out some of the “complex relationships among conditions and their subsequent relations to actions and interactions” (p. 131).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that a phenomenon is “a term that answers to the question, ‘what is going on here?’” (p. 130) and encompasses a repeated pattern of
happenings, events, or actions/interaction that “represents what people do or say in response to the problems and situation in which they find themselves” (p. 130). Conditions, on the other hand, can be defined as events or happenings that explain why and how persons or groups respond to the phenomenon in certain ways. Several different types of conditions exist that are explored in more detail in axial coding. “Causal conditions” include events or happenings that influence the phenomenon, while “intervening conditions” alter the impact of causal conditions on the phenomenon. “Contextual conditions” are sets of conditions that create a set of circumstances to which individuals need to respond through actions and interactions. “Strategies” include actions and interactions that have a purpose and are deployed to resolve a problem, which, in turn, affects the phenomenon. The term “consequences” is an action/interaction that is taken (or lack thereof), resulting in a variety of different effects that may alter the phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) paradigm model suggests that when causal conditions exist and influence the phenomenon, the context and intervening conditions affect the strategies that are used to bring about certain consequences.

**Causal conditions.** The call to change UNL’s general education program came from the Chancellor after faculty, students, and parents had expressed dissatisfaction with the previous general education program. While most participants believed that the decision to change the general education program was made by the administration, some faculty remembered that prior to the “official” decision to start from scratch, the Faculty Senate had made an attempt to fix CEP by establishing an ad hoc committee of Senators. One former President of the Faculty Senate remembered that “we did try to reform CEP and then when that effort essentially failed, the decision was made by the Senior Vice
Chancellor for Academic Affairs to start from scratch. [...] I’m not entirely sure why they did that.”

The question, then, is why the administration decided to “start over?” Some faculty believed that the SVCAA’s decision was driven by political reasons. An ad hoc committee member said, “the SVCAA wanted to say that she did something. It was definitely driven from the top down because we had a proposal and it was dismissed. It just disappeared and nobody ever really told me why.” On the other hand, many of the participants indicated that it was the right decision to start over because CEP had become so “unwieldy” and “complicated” that it would have been impossible to add an accountability measure to it while also ensuring a quality education since so many courses were taught completely differently from when they were first approved as CEP courses.

It appears that the two major events or happenings that affected general education reform can be summarized as internal and external pressures. Accreditation requirements and assessment mandates, as well as competition for students in a challenging economic climate were the main factors that called for curricular change. The most significant problem was that, from the perspective of most participants, “CEP wasn’t working.” Even those faculty who, in principle, liked the previous program, admitted that it had “gotten out of hand,” with too many approved courses and not enough “quality control.” While many of the participants frequently cited practical issues as problems with CEP, several participants expressed intellectual concerns. One participant in Arts & Sciences said,
What bothered me a lot about our general education system was our integrative studies, which I think was awful. I thought it was morally bankrupt. We claimed that we were doing this that we weren’t really doing. We claimed that we were teaching writing but many of them weren’t teaching writing. [...] It was a system that was fundamentally dishonest. There were no checks. Not only to correct the dishonesty but to discover it.

Participants linked the problem of incoherence of general education courses to the fact that several thousand courses had been approved for the IS/ES system and that departments were forced to hire part-time faculty, adjunct instructors and graduate teaching assistants to teach them. “Teachers inherited courses that used to be writing intensive and they didn’t realize that they were supposed to be writing intensive or weren’t very interested in doing that.” Participants used the word “fraud” repeatedly when describing the previous system. The need for assessment and excellence in teaching were at the core of the internal pressures for general education reform and several participants predicted that it will again be at the core of the new program:

The danger is that we’ll end up like we did before: with fraud. That we won’t have full-time faculty teaching, that we won’t have the meticulous planning that went into each of these courses, and we’ll get away from these fundamentals that we wanted to make sure our students could get.

These internal pressures are clearly linked to the lack of financial resources, which is both a causal condition as well as intervening condition. As a causal condition, the continued lack of financial resources over time appears to have contributed to the erosion of the previous program. Some participants had heard “rumors” that ACE would be supported by significant funding, which turned out not to be the case. Participants discussed their concerns regarding the new general education program and that it is, again, unfunded. “You can only sustain a program like ACE by supporting faculty who
contribute to the general education process. It becomes part of the reward structure.

You provide monetary incentives and course release time.” It appears that there is a risk that the internal pressures that influenced UNL to change its general education program may continue to exist and negatively affect ACE in the future. As one participant from Business Administration noticed after one of their newly certified ACE courses filled up immediately at New Student Enrollment during the summer just before ACE was implemented:

I went to the Dean and said, “We have all this student demand. Do we want to open another section? And he said, “We have no money to pay an additional instructor.” Because of the cutback over the last 10 years our college and other colleges are running faculty at bare minimum and we are only able to offer core courses so students can get done in four years. I think parents and students would like to get done in four years and that is [the administration’s] first priority. Their second priority is all this nice general education stuff. So there is just no money to do that.

External pressures were another variable that influenced the decision to develop a new general education program. Some participants indicated that at the time when the Chancellor made the call for change, UNL’s enrollment had been declining and that the previous general education was not conducive to transfer students from other institutions, who wanted to finish their education at UNL. “It became clear that other institutions were pointing to our cumbersome CEP program and were actually using it against us.” In addition to CEP being a recruiting problem, it was also a retention problem because students who wanted to transfer within UNL weren’t necessarily able to transfer general education courses from one college to another because each college was in charge of its own curriculum and decided which courses it would recognize as general education courses. While most participants spoke somewhat negatively about the enrollment issue
as a driving factor behind UNL’s general education reform, some saw it as a necessity.

One participant from Arts & Sciences explained,

I think the motivation was student enrollment and retention. But is that so bad? On one hand I want to say, yeah, of course it isn’t everything we do. But part of what I do is to be a good teacher because I believe in education and I want more people to go to college and I want more people to come to my class.

Another external variable that influenced UNL’s general education reform was North Central Accreditation:

I think a number of institutions across the country were involved in rethinking their general education [programs] and I think North Central Accreditation may also have asked our administrator, ‘what are you doing relative to general education?’ And my sense it that the administration said they were working on it and once they said that we had to do it.

When asked what drove the process, one participant from Education & Human Sciences indicated that the need to fulfill accrediting criteria was bigger than the desire to improve education. “I think it was the accreditation criteria [that drove the process]. ACE was a response to that. I don’t think this was driven by what’s good for the students. I hate to say that.” While assessment and accreditation were certainly the two major external factors influencing the decision to reform the general education program, some participants also acknowledged that UNL was not following current general education trends. This insight came primarily from those participants who had been deeply involved in the development of ACE. A former President of the Faculty Senate indicated that he and other faculty went to an AAC&U general education conference that provided the group with the latest trends in general education, focusing on building outcomes-based programs that would be assessable. The former chair of the GEAC and GEPT committees remembered, “they came back with some ideas on what a program ought to accomplish.”
Prior to the current curricular change, general education had been in place at UNL since 1995, when CEP was developed and introduced the IS/ES components that students needed to fulfill. One participant from Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources said that some experts at the AAC&U general education workshop concluded that CEP was not even a general education program because each college decided which courses would and would not count. Thus, it became clear to many faculty and administrators that UNL needed to start designing and building a completely new general education program instead of saving CEP.

The themes of enthusiasm for change, a strong administrative call for change and the disparity between student needs and dysfunctional current general education program emerged as internal pressures for change. External pressures included accrediting and assessment mandates and slowing student enrollment.

**The phenomenon.** The phenomenon answers the question of what is going on in a particular process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Phenomena are “repeated patterns of happenings or events that represent what people do or say, alone or together, in response to the problems and situations in which they find themselves” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 130). One of the most important questions of each interview asked participants to tell the story of general education reform at UNL from their perspective. It turned out that many faculty who were not involved in the development of ACE, in the Faculty Senate, or in their college’s or department’s curriculum committees, struggled to say much about the new general education program, let alone describe the reform process. The researcher therefore made the decision to include only faculty in the sample who could remember the reform process. The stories the participants told focused on different parts of the
reform process, depending on when and where the respondents were most active. Some stories included gaps and factual errors but they were always based on participants’ perceptions of the process.

When describing the reform process, participants compartmentalized it into different phases. For some participants it was easiest to describe the process chronologically by year, while others described it in major milestones, such as the two-step voting process on the proposals or the certification of a course they had submitted. Although participants told the story of general education reform from different perspectives and with different emphases, it became clear that the reform process went through distinct phases. Therefore, the phenomenon is entitled, “Phases of a General Education Curriculum Reform at a Research-Extensive University.”

It appears that general education reform is a cyclical process that consists of overlapping components that occur sequentially. Each phase must be completed before the process can move on to the next phase. Depending on contextual and intervening conditions, each phase can have different timelines, motivations for moving on, and outcomes. In this particular process it appears that failure was not an option and that the administration indicated that this new general education program was going to be developed and implemented within an aggressive timeline. Overall, there were five phases in the reform process: call for change, appointing the committee, designing the program, adopting the program, and populating the program.

Calling for change. While internal and external pressures provided the causal conditions for the reform process, the first phase of the process was the call for change. Faculty overwhelmingly indicated that the decision to start a new general education
reform was a top-down approach, indicating that Chancellor Perlman decided that it would happen. Faculty used a variety of words that described the influence of the administration, ranging from “made it possible” to “mandated it.” Some participants believed that the call for change was driven by faculty. Especially those participants who had served on the Faculty Senate indicated that the Senate was the forum in which disenchantments of the previous general education programs were first heard and discussed. One of the participants described the call for change as a framework that was put together by the administration and then handed over to a group of faculty to develop the actual program. Several participants indicated that the call was “definitely not driven by students” although they indicated that students were frustrated with the old system. One participant from Business Administration explained that in his college, central advising was so effective that most students did not have to worry about the complexities of the previous system. “I bet that 90% of students had no clue what [IS/ES] was for them. So that suggests to me that there was no pressing dissatisfaction with the program, which tells me that students weren’t driving this.” Other participants said that they simply could not remember who initiated the change.

Appointing the committee. In the second phase of the reform process, the administration appointed two committees to head up the reform process: the general education planning team (GEPT) and the general education advisory committee (GEAC). GEPT was the main group to coordinate the review and reform effort with the charge to prepare the four reform proposals for review and approval by all eight colleges. GEPT consisted of eight members, including five faculty who also served on key committees on campus (Academic Planning Committee, Faculty Senate, University Curriculum
Committee) and three administrators. Only four of the eight undergraduate colleges were represented. GEPT received regular feedback from the university community as a whole as well as GEAC. GEAC’s main responsibility was to provide “advice and broader campus perspectives” to GEPT and to act as the liaison between GEPT and the eight college’s curriculum committees. GEPT consisted of 25 members, including 14 faculty members representing each of the eight colleges, two students, one representative from the libraries, one from General Studies, and seven administrators. Members of GEPT were automatically included in GEAC. Both groups were chaired by a well-respected faculty member from Arts & Sciences.

Participants discussed how individuals were appointed to GEAC and GEPT and how much effort went into developing the program. They spoke about the importance of leadership as many participants discussed the role and influence of the chair of GEAC and GEPT, whom they described as a “celebrity professor.” A science professor with many different interests, participants praised his ability to facilitate discussions, provide feedback to the faculty as a whole, and meeting with the colleges separately to answer any questions before the adoption phase of the reform process. The chair of the committee had such a strong presence that some participants believed that ACE was entirely his “brain child.” One faculty member who was not part of the initial planning committees said, “The presence of one or two well respected individuals to take a leadership role is absolutely critical.” The chair of the two committees, who was a participant in this study, said that his focus was on first providing some background on the fundamentals of general education and then examining the differences of programs at different universities. The leadership of the GEAC members as liaisons between GEPT
and their respective colleges was equally important. “There were several people from our college that were trying to be voices of reason, trying to make sure that the college’s interests were represented but also not trying to come out with a product that wouldn’t be effective at all.”

Another important theme of phase two was representation on the committee. Participants discussed the type of committee members that were appointed to GEAC and GEPT. Several of the participants noticed that the committee structure included not just faculty and student representation but also a representative from the admissions office, as well as other administrators. Most participants pointed out that those two key committees should consist of faculty only because the committees were charged with the design of the new curriculum, although they indicated that it would be reasonable to include students. Participants also discussed the focus of the committees as the new program was being developed. What would these changes mean to them or their department? Some of the participants pointed out that the focus of the committee members was either on themselves or their unit but not the students. The chair of the committees mentioned that it took time to get “beyond our preventable nature.” “It took us almost a semester to talk across the board instead of our [individual] best interests.” The theme “focus” also pertained to the purpose of the committee and accomplishing important asks. The chair of the committee described that the key to running effective meetings was to stay on task. “It is simply the practice of having an agenda and sticking to it as best we could.”

**Designing the program.** The third phase of the reform process was “designing the program.” The charge of the committees was to develop a set of four proposals, including UNL’s General Student Learning Outcomes, Structural Criteria for General Education, a
General Education Program, and an Assessment and Oversight Process (Appendix A).

The chair of GEAC and GEPT explained that it was important to concentrate on the original charge, but to stay clear of any specific discussions about assessment:

It became obvious to me pretty quickly that as soon as the committee started talking about assessment that was the end of any productive discussion that we were going to have that day. [...] My personal feeling of accomplishment about managing that committee, it’s keeping the discussions of assessment under control.

This quote illustrates the difficult nature of developing and implementing a general education program with assessable outcomes, an important theme that emerged throughout this study and that was mentioned repeatedly as a challenge that ACE will face in the future. The quote shows that the discussions about assessment were put on hold early during the reform process, which helped to develop the program but might potentially cause problems in the future because the assessment structure was not as well developed as the program itself. This issue is discussed at length under “consequences” later in this chapter.

Participants spoke extensively about the different roles individuals played. For example, they discussed the level of involvement of university administrators as well as college Deans and department chairs. Participants frequently mentioned the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, who appeared to be a key facilitator between the GEAC/GEPT committees, the administration, and the faculty at-large. Participants also commented on the lack of involvement among faculty and acknowledged the fact that most faculty simply did not have the time to participate because they were “being pulled into too many different directions.” The influence of individuals was important in the
development of the program and is discussed in more detail under
“contextual/intervening conditions.”

Communication was another theme that emerged as part of the design phase of
the process. Some participants credited the Faculty Senate for successfully
communicating with the faculty, especially in the beginning stages. “I think most faculty
heard about it through their Senate member.” In general, participants praised the
communication efforts of GEAC and GEPT that were mostly coordinated by the Office
for Undergraduate Studies. Participants overwhelmingly indicated that there was
communication about the development of ACE from several sources simultaneously,
which helped to keep faculty up-to-date on committee decisions. “I think that openness
and transparency, and communication were a hallmark of what the general education
leadership attempted to do.” Another participant said,

There was a real emphasis on communicating, on getting the word out and
they had a Web site. I’m not particularly a Web site person but a lot of
young faculty are. They could address issues directly to [the chair of
GEAC and GEPT] and his committee and there was a lot of action on that.
There was actually quite a bit of discussion on this. There was real
attention devoted to communicating.

Participants appreciated the frequent email updates and content that was available
on a Web site. “There was always a lot of material on the Web if you want to follow it. A
lot of the minutes from their meetings and draft and stuff. You certainly could follow if
you wanted to.” Faculty also appreciated the open forums that were held frequently to
hear feedback from faculty. “There was an opportunity to express opinions and
objections early on and I think that goes a long way with the perception that it is not
something being stuffed down our throats.” Another participant agreed that the open forums were helpful but that they happened too late in the design phase:

In that first year the people on the committees thought that they were making it open to faculty and there were in a sense but I thought it should be much more open. They were getting initial input from faculty and then they were hiding behind closed doors and coming up with detailed proposals that were to some extent based on faculty input but between the initial phase when they had no ideas and got input from faculty and the point at which they came out with a finished product, there was very little room for faculty input. Once they got the finished product, say, proposal one, they let faculty look over that and make comments but they were extremely resistant to any change.

Another participant agreed, “They had a number of public forums, which many faculty went to, and we made suggestions that were ignored.” One participant from Arts & Sciences said, “One of the problems was that once language was in place it was very difficult to get any movement.” This issue appears to be closely related to the cultural bond committee members had. “I think the committee had been so involved and had such a strong sense of ownership that they found criticism very difficult to take. And they were very defensive about it and I can understand that. Unfortunately, they made the process a little more antagonistic than it needed to be.”

Still, the open forums played an important role in the reform process. As one participant from psychology said, “it was important for faculty to be able to vent.” The participants also noticed that, although the open forums were well attended, most of their colleagues opted not to go. “I honestly don’t think many people realized how important a change this was going to be, so they didn’t spend much time on it,” said one participant from Arts & Sciences. When asked when they first became aware of the general education reform process, some of the participants indicated that the process itself always
had the name “ACE.” “It seemed like it already had its acronym before I heard about this.”

One of the most effective ways to communicate was through the GEAC representatives from each college, who updated faculty and administrators in their respective colleges. Especially in Arts & Sciences, department chairs were encouraged by their Dean to discuss ACE. “Department heads were encouraged to discuss it, and we did. And we had several discussions, we didn’t have special department meetings to discuss it but we brought it up on several occasions because we needed to know what was happening.” The chair of GEAC and GEPT was also an effective communicator. “[He] was communicating directly with faculty. In addition, the committee was communicating directly with college curriculum committees, departmental committees and undergraduate advisers. The chair of GEAC and GEPT reflected on the communication process as follows:

I think the serious faculty forums were there to let faculty speak their minds. I think that was instrumental. We visited every college, we visited with lots of groups and I think the openness there, the fact that we went around to talk to people everywhere was quite helpful. It let people kind of work through their concerns. The more you talk about it, the more the positives come out and the negatives don’t seem so difficult.

Participants reacted to the chair’s college visits very positively. One participant from Journalism and Mass Communications said,

[He] was one of the people that came to visit with us to talk about it initially and to promote it a little bit and he did a nice job I think of gaining support with some of those kinds of visits, not only with us but with others.
Another participant from Arts & Sciences credited these visits with convincing faculty to vote for the proposals. “I bet you when the College of Arts & Sciences came around, I bet you it was through the personal lobbying of individuals.”

**Adopting the program.** The fourth phase of the reform process was “Adopting the Program.” All eight colleges had to accept the four proposals that had been developed by GEAC and GEPT unanimously for ACE to replace CEP. The voting occurred in two-steps. Each college voted on proposals one and two first (institutional objectives & learning outcomes; structural criteria) and proposals three and four (populating ACE; assessment of student learning outcomes) in a second vote. One participant from Journalism and Mass Communications explained,

> The theory was that people couldn’t get their intellect around all the things at one time and so that people would understand what was going on and that would be a way to get their attention and help them start providing feedback to the committee. And then some things got adjusted along the way. It was a two-step process.

The voting of each step did not occur simultaneously, as each college had faculty meetings scheduled at different times. One participant from Business Administration explained that she was concerned about the fact that each college voted at a different time because the outcome of each vote would put more pressure on the college that voted next.

One of our biggest concerns was that every college had the potential to be viewed as the villain. My thought was Art & Sciences will view themselves as a big loser under this process and they will be obstinate and won’t want to go for it. So we were honestly surprised in the College of Business that Arts & Sciences did go for it.

The colleges approved the four proposals in a variety of ways. For some, the votes happened quickly, without much controversy. For others, they happened provisionally.

For example, most of the smaller, professional colleges adopted the new program
quickly. The chair of GEAC and GEPT connected this occurrence to the fact that those colleges were already required by their respective accrediting bodies to assess student learning in their courses.

One of the things I found pretty helpful was that some of our colleges already answered to accrediting. So the fact that there were quite a few faculty members from different colleges that were not afraid of assessment [...] that helped quite a bit in the discussions.

“Faculty buy-in” was an important theme that emerged during the adoption phase of the program. It should be noted here that most faculty that were approached to participate in this study indicated they did not know much about general education in general and ACE in particular. The ones who did participate were mostly personally interested in general education and many of them served either on curriculum committees or were heavily involved in teaching and advising. It appears that the chair of GEAC and GEPT as well as other committee members influenced many faculty to vote in favor of the program. Although some of them would like to have seen more faculty discussion, they realized that a longer timeline and more inclusive structure were not necessarily feasible because otherwise the reform process would never have finished. Others described the adoption of ACE as a “train that couldn’t be stopped, so why bother fighting it?” Some of the participants theorized that faculty in general became tired of the discussion and believed that the process of development was a “done deal.” One participant from Arts & Sciences described the process of development and adoption as follows:

You get a committee that spends a huge amount of time wrangling over the words, and discussing the underlying philosophy and come to some consensus till they feel good about it. Then they present it to a larger body of faculty who then raise their concerns and their fears and anxieties. Then
you go through a round of revisions and try again. You keep doing that until people become exhausted with it and say, “all to hell with it, let’s say yes and get it over with.”

Some faculty remembered and described the voting process in their colleges vividly, while others could not recall that they even voted on the adoption of ACE. Although most of the colleges voted in favor of the first two proposals, participants described that the College of Architecture and the College of Arts & Sciences initially voted against them. Several of the participants from Arts & Sciences recalled a “revision” process of the initial proposals by an ad hoc committee consisting of faculty from the College of Arts & Sciences after the faculty in that college had tabled their vote on the first two proposals. According to a participant from Architecture, the faculty there had voted against the first two proposals because they “didn’t raise the bar of general education.” When asked what happened next, the participant replied, “We were forced into voting ‘yes.’” The participants indicated that the college was strongly urged by the administration to revote. “It was pretty clear that if we insisted [on the initial vote against the two proposals] that we would pay the price. […] Nobody actually said, ‘chance your vote’ but it was pretty clear in indirect ways that if we didn’t, that it would not be looked favorably upon.” The college finally decided to revote, because, “we deal with clients all the time and when the client says, ‘no,’ you change gears and make it work.”

**Populating the program.** Populating the program was the fifth phase of the reform process, which consisted of 18 months of weekly two-hour meetings to certify ACE courses. After all eight colleges had approved the four governing documents, the Deans were asked to appoint one representative from their respective colleges to serve on the “interim ACE committee” (iACE) that was responsible for reviewing course
proposals, providing feedback to submitters and deciding whether or not submitted
courses should be certified. In addition, each college had designated course facilitators
that would help faculty with the submission of course proposals. Many of the participants
shared their college’s and department’s course submission strategies during the
interviews. For the most part, participants said that they submitted those courses that had
been approved as IS/ES courses in the previous system. However, some colleges had
additional strategies behind their decision to put up courses for certification. One
participant from Architecture said,

In the larger scheme of things we are not a college that delivers general
education to a wide audience. We do deliver general education in strategic
ways and we’ve made decisions about courses we think are the most
appropriate for that. [...] We are a strong believer in what our
accreditation requires. Our students [should have] a significant education
outside of professional education. But with the new system our students
can take about 70% or more of ACE inside the college, which is not what
we really want.

One focus of submission strategies was on ensuring that students would have the
opportunity to achieve outcome #10 (generating a creative or scholarly product requires
broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis,
interpretation, presentation, and reflection) in the major. This was a strategy that was
relatively easy for the professional colleges that had their own accrediting criteria, but
more difficult for departments in Arts & Sciences, whose majors typically did not have a
capstone experience. One participant from the history departments said,

Years ago we had a historical methods class, senior level, where you
learned how to do a research paper. All history majors had to take it in
their last semester here, which doesn’t make a whole lot of sense because
you are supposed to know how to do research so you can use it in your
upper level classes, so we changed that to a 200-level class with the idea
that generally people would take it when they are juniors.
Submission strategies were also related to the need for funding. Several participants mentioned that the administration had promised funding to support ACE, so some colleges decided to put more courses up for certification than necessary. One participant from Business Administration said,

There was a rumor that there could be extra resources for ACE courses; therefore, we put forward a lot of courses so that we could be part of the extra resource pool because if you didn’t have ACE you couldn’t have any of this new faculty line money.

Another strategic consideration was to certify large lecture courses as ACE courses so that they could serve as recruiting tools. A participant from Education & Human Sciences said,

There was another reason for us that I felt that we should become involved in ACE. […] We don’t have a lot of freshmen who come to [our major] because they don’t know about it. They know about psychology and sociology but they just don’t know about our major. […] It’s a recruiting tool.

While most participants said that their department thought about strategies for submitting ACE proposals, some indicated that their Dean was demanding that departments submit courses for ACE approval. “Our Dean ordered every department to put forward ACE courses.” In another college, the decision appeared to be up to individual faculty members:

We had a lot encouragement to have our courses certified. Each faculty member was given the opportunity to write a certification proposal. Some people took the opportunity and others ran away from it because they didn’t have much time to deal with it, didn’t want to think about it, didn’t care about it.

Participants also described their frustrations with the submission of courses, including the lack of help (depending on their college), and type of feedback they
received from the interim ACE committee after submitting courses for certification. One participant said that the courses that were submitted during this phase had been former IS/ES courses. They were not changed in any way to help student accomplish learning goals. She said the submission process was about using the right language to fit the ACE guidelines for a particular outcome:

All we did was reassign the ACE status to pre-existing classes that had been part of the old general education program and since this class is more particularly designed or not designed to meet the goals of ACE. The process came to be about the proposals and that the proposals used a certain language and that the proposals became an end in themselves and that the interest became that certain words were said in the proposals, that points were said that had nothing to do with the reality that is being taught in these classes or very little.

Some reported difficulties with the online submission system, while others questioned the level of expertise of the iACE committee members. “I didn’t think people were reading [the proposals] closely and you start to wonder about the qualifications of the reader.” Others said they were bothered to be “rejected with no useful feedback.” In addition, they noticed problems with the “rules” of ACE that supposedly had been established by the four proposals that had been voted on prior to the certification phase:

The rules kind of changed. They kind of evolved as the process was going on. And this is nobody’s fault because until you actually get in there and start doing the process it’s a little bit hard, you can’t anticipate every particular question that may come up. And so the committee had to kind of evolve their procedures a little bit. Sometimes there was a little bit of going back and do it again and yeah, it’s a little bit frustrating.

Participants also described the time commitment that was required to submit ACE courses for certification and to coordinate departments’ course proposals. Participants thought that the facilitators were a good idea in principle, but did not work as well in practice:
There needed to be more time, there needed to be more people involved in facilitation and there needed to be people who understand how you work with other people and them to cooperate with you instead of how to piss them off. The facilitators were chosen just on the basis of who was involved here. They had very little authority. Some of them did stuff and some did nothing. They were very ineffective and that had to do with the way they were chosen. The idea behind it was good. It could have been a good way to achieve what they needed to.

Those who served on the committee knew that it was a “thankless job” and demanded a “huge time commitment” but they agreed to do it anyway because they had either been invested in the reform process early on or had a personal interest in general education. Although some participants were frustrated with the feedback they received from the iACE committee about their submissions, they indicated that they were impressed with the diplomatic skills of the Director of General Education, who chaired the committee and functioned as a conduit of ideas between faculty and the iACE committee members. “She came without a great deal of baggage. She was neutral and a very calm, warm, and friendly person, whose presence could diffuse tensions.”

Finally, participants described the level of diplomacy among members of the iACE committee to agree on which courses would be certified, which would be sent back for revisions, and which ones would be denied. Diplomacy and collegiality among committee members was an important theme during phases three (designing the program) and four (populating the program) of the process. One participant who currently serves on a University Curriculum Committee sub-committee that certifies ACE courses, said,

We are still primarily focused on populating ACE and really, boy, I have been impressed. I do not enjoy two hours every month of hammering this baby out but I got to tell you that it continues just to be satisfying to see people there with such a big concern that there would be political infighting and there has not been one.
Contextual conditions. There were specific contextual conditions that affected the strategies for achieving a new general education program. Contextual conditions are patterns of conditions that create the set of problems and circumstances to which individuals respond through actions, while intervening conditions are those that alter causal conditions on phenomena. The contextual conditions included the degree of faculty buy-in to the reform process, the leadership of specific individuals (both faculty and administrators) on the reform process, and the timeline of the reform process.

Faculty buy-in. Faculty buy-in was an important contextual condition. One participant who was deeply involved in the development phase said, “I would like to hope that tenured faculty members, especially the mid-career and senior faculty buy into this program because I think that it has the potential to really turn this university into a very high quality place.” The degree of faculty buy-in changed from one phase to the next. Participants talked about the fact that most faculty ignored the reform process even though many faculty were interested in general education in general and the reform process in particular. Some participants had bought into the reform process before it even started because they did not like or understand the previous program. Others did not necessarily believe that reform was necessary because they believed in CEP but as the program developed started to become more engaged in the process and evolved into ACE supporters. This was especially true when they were appointed to represent their respective colleges on one of the committees or if they represented their department on the Faculty Senate. One participant from Architecture said, “It’s actually not really true that I was all that interested in ACE. I saw it as part of my responsibility to report back to
“He explained that for most faculty, the process of discussion and debate was simply too much to follow on a regular basis:

I found the IS/ES system rather confusing and difficult to administrate, so I was actually for [curriculum reform] and sympathetic to it. Like the rest of my faculty I felt that there was going to be so much discussion all over the place, I would rather wait until it filtered down and there was really something that we could talk about.

Participants pointed out that, unless faculty were really interested in general education, they probably wouldn’t see much of a difference between CEP and ACE. If faculty teach mostly graduate level courses or have a large research apportionment general education simply would not be on their “radar,” which explains low faculty participation and buy-in. One participant pointed out that most faculty probably don’t buy into the program because they don’t understand it and the reason they don’t understand it is because “they have been protected from undergraduate education.”

The degree of faculty buy-in was closely related to the faculty’s perception about who drove the reform process. Most of the participants indicated that the administration drove the process during the first three phases of the process. However, they admitted that, even though curricular issues are supposed to be determined by the faculty, it took administrative leadership to set the framework for the process and to support it financially and philosophically.

Some wanted to be involved, some did not. I think [GEAC/GEPT] and the Chancellor’s Office did a good job of covering themselves, if you want to call it that, by having open forums so they could say that if you had a problem you had many opportunities to stress it and I would say 25 percent [of faculty] felt strongly and 75 percent did not.
However, the level of distrust increased as administrators were still visibly involved during the design and adoption phases of the new program. Only a few participants thought that the process was faculty driven:

If it wasn’t faculty driven, the faculty probably didn’t want it. It worked because it was faculty driven and it worked because the folks on these various committees worked well together and kept in mind the big picture and the goals that needed to be achieved.

Participants said that although many faculty were not one hundred percent happy with the final product they tended to buy into ACE simply because it was better than CEP. “I have some concerns here but it is better than what we had before,” was a common response among participants. At the same time, one participant noticed that “opening up the process to faculty on campus” contributed to faculty buy-in.

It largely eliminated the backlash that you would get from faculty that would vote against it simply because they don’t believe it is a faculty program. ‘I don’t care whether it’s good or bad but it is not from faculty so I’m voting against it.’ Opening the process a lot more eliminated that backlash to a very large extent.

Although opening up the communication efforts and hosting open forums were important components of the reform process, this strategy also has limits in what it can achieve. One participant estimated that 75 to 85 percent of the faculty were completely indifferent to changes in the general education program. Another participant who had served on GEAC and GEPT said,

The story I would love to tell is that the results of this communication process and this real commitment to try and build something, the secret to this campus is that we got everybody on board. But the fact was that we got the minimum on board that we needed to get the vote.

For some of the participants faculty buy-in was closely related to student buy-in. “I hope there’s a way to get students more involved in their own future so they are a little
bit more invested in what they do. I hate it when somebody comes to me and says, ‘what’s the easiest science class you could do?’” They expressed concern that the burden of ACE is on the faculty as opposed to the students. “I wish there was something more that were done to make [students] buy into the process. Make them work to produce something at the end rather than the faculty to have to do this.” This quote also shows concerns about assessment, which appeared to be closely related to low faculty buy-in. “There needs to be a cycle where we, the faculty, are going to look at this and see if it is working and see if it’s not. Rather than having the administration say, ‘you must.’” Faculty buy-in was also closely related to leadership, which will be discussed in the next section.

Leadership. The influence of a few individuals who were highly involved in the process was another contextual condition. One of the main categories that emerged during open coding was “influencers” and included groups of people, such as the various committees that worked on ACE, as well as individuals such as Deans, department chairs, and administrators. During axial coding it became clear that the leadership of several specific individuals created a set of circumstances to which other individuals responded. As one participant said, “I think individuals were very important in the process because without people who really get passionately interested in these things I don’t think these things would happen.”

Three administrators appeared to have significantly influenced the reform process: the Chancellor, the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Curriculum and Teaching in Academic Affairs. Interestingly, the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, who spearheaded the
reform, was only mentioned tangentially. Participants remembered that the reform process started during her first year in office. They recalled that she was the person who decided that the initial efforts to revise CEP could not be reconciled and that the reform process should start from scratch. One participant said, “I think our Senior Vice Chancellor wanted to say that she did something.” Most participants characterized the leadership style of the administration as a “top-down approach.” When asked to describe the role of the administration in the reform process one participant described it as “browbeating each college into accepting the new program.” Participants indicated that the two main administrators were unrealistic about the time that would be required to build a new program from scratch.

One administrator that stood out as an effective facilitator between the GEAC/GEPT committees and the faculty at-large was the Associate Vice Chancellor for Curriculum and Teaching in Academic Affairs, who also is a faculty member in Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education. For the most part participants described the leadership of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning as “competent facilitator,” found him “reasonable to work with,” and appreciated that he made himself available for questions and comments. One participant from Arts & Sciences said, “He was assigned to work with the committee and that was the perfect choice because [he] organized and understood curriculum because he comes from that background. He was able to help facilitate the work of that committee.” Another participant from the same college said, “Academic Affairs is pretty damned lucky that they have [him] because I don’t think anyone else could have done this. I don’t know who else could have negotiated and renegotiated when things got rough.” Some participants said that his role
on the initial committee was more active than passive. They described him as the person who was able to synthesize several committee members’ ideas to articulate learning objectives that the majority of the committee could agree with. However, some participants were put off by his leadership style, especially when he was unhappy about one of the colleges voting against the first set of proposals. “He was visibly upset and angry that we voted ‘no.’ Why [he] decided that he had the authority to pass judgment on something is an absolute mystery to me.”

Participants mentioned several faculty members who were appointed or elected to positions that directly or indirectly influenced the reform process. For example, as described in the open coding section, the Faculty Senate played an important role not only because the reform process was discussed there but also because of the leadership that many of the senators trusted:

I just viewed [the President of the Faculty Senate] as an important person because [she made the Senate] aware of similar systems around the country, that the IS/ES system was outdated and that it needed to be updated. It seemed like important people like [the President of the Faculty Senate] were presenting that and I just took their word for it.

During the development of the program one highly effective individual was the chair of GEAC and GEPT, whom participants not only trusted and respected but also admired because of his personal interest in and dedication to general education. “I really admire [him] because he always tries to teach an introductory course in his year-long amount.” He gave the process instant credibility. “I’ve always respected how he goes about doing things and so the fact that he was leading the charge on this immediately made me more receptive to it.” Participants credited this individual for making the reform process more transparent and for emphasizing the need to keep faculty informed.
Once the program was developed and adopted by all eight colleges, a new committee was formed to populate ACE. Many participants credited the leadership of the committee, the Director for General Education, with moving the certification process forward:

The appointment of [the Director of General Education] was brilliant. She was as apolitical as you could be because she was from a college that is not traditionally close to the academic heart, which is traditionally Arts & Sciences. She came without a great deal of baggage. She was a very neutral and very calm, warm, and friendly person whose presence could defuse tension that would arise.

**Timeline.** Another theme that participants frequently discussed was the aggressive timeline of the reform process as a whole. Almost all of the participants mentioned that the two-year timeline of developing and adopting ACE was too short to create a general education program from scratch because it did not allow for revisions and enough discussion from a wide range of faculty:

I really wish I knew at the beginning of the process what I knew by the end of it. That what we voted on, proposals one and two, was really what it was and those proposals really weren’t going to get much change because I still believed that we were going to be able to revise them. And I think I might have said that at a college faculty meeting that we are going to be able to revise these things as we move forward. I honestly think that the timeline was a little bit unworkable.

The timeline was an important contextual condition that exerted a lot of pressure on the faculty and appears to be related to faculty buy-in:

I think faculty buy-in at large, some of them understood it was a big issue too late. They understand it was a big issue but by that time there was no time to go back and really radically revise, and some people didn’t really understand when they voted on proposals one and two that they thought that those proposals could have been changed.
Another participant from Arts & Sciences explained that the reason why faculty members are in the academic world is because they want to take enough time to make an educated decision. “I think we could have had a more realistic timeline to get people involved and certainly more time to think through how we were going to assess these things.”

The timeline also played a role during certification of ACE courses after the program was adopted. As one participant from Arts & Sciences explained, “it was honestly a ridiculous timeline and I will say that I did virtually nothing else last year except organize ACE courses.”

**Intervening conditions.** Intervening conditions are those that alter the impact of causal conditions on phenomena. They provide the “broader structural context” to the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 131). The intervening conditions that helped or constrained the strategies used by the participants included institutional culture, politics, and economic climate.

**Institutional culture.** Participants spoke at length about UNL’s institutional culture, including the institution’s governing structure, the type of organization, its level of collegiality, and the mission of the university. As a land-grant university, UNL has three primary missions, including research, teaching and service. Almost all of the participants commented on the fact that many faculty, especially those on tenure-track, have to primarily focus on producing research, often at the expense of curriculum development and other service-type activities. They indicated that they were “being pulled into too many different directions” to get directly involved in general education reform.
Another important theme was collegiality. UNL has a highly decentralized power structure that includes eight undergraduate colleges that have been granted the right to determine their own curricula by the Nebraska legislature. The participants had differing views on the level of collegiality among the undergraduate colleges. A former President of the Faculty Senate characterized the university as “not very collegial,” whereas other faculty thought that it was quite collegial. Another former President of the Faculty Senate said, “If there is a situation where there is a minus vote [on an issue] it is not going to be a personal problem. It’s taken to be an academic or intellectual concern and that is reasonable.” Another term that was mentioned frequently was “turf wars.” Some of the participants, especially from Arts & Sciences, used this term to describe how colleges and departments often compete for students and student credit hours. Participants spoke about collegiality and citizenship as a compromise each college had to make for the greater good. One participant said, “Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.”

UNL’s governing structure also seemed to be a significant intervening theme. Overall, it appears that changes in the curriculum are generally made by the faculty. However, participants from some of the smaller colleges indicated that the Deans play an important role in the governing structure, urging faculty to vote for or against an issue. Some participants said that often faculty do not get involved in curricular discussions such as general education reform. One participant from Arts & Sciences said, “I’m not sure that they understand that their vote actually counts.” In terms of faculty and student identity, some participants observed that often campus discussions among faculty from different colleges and departments are driven by a concern for themselves or their
departments but not necessarily by a concern for what is best for the students. Some participants noticed that many students appear to identify only with grades but not so much with an interest in what they actually learn. In addition, they tend to be very focused on their major but not necessarily general education. “I don’t see a whole lot of curiosity here, or not as much as I think there should be. I think the system needs to encourage, if not enforce, students to take classes outside of their own areas of interest.”

Politics. Internal and external campus politics was an intervening condition that was closely related to institutional culture. Participants explained that general education reform is a political process because it involves values. Interestingly, several participants compared the general education reform process to the national health care reform under the leadership of President Obama. One participant from Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources sums it up as follows:

It’s important for people to take into account the special interest they may have in this. It’s like the health care bill. Are we going to get health care or not? I think the political give and take of the process that seems to focus mostly on faculty instead of students’ interests may have been something that we absolutely had to have and it may not speak well of us.

The political process included both external and internal politics. External political pressures include the need for state funding for an institution whose previous general education program did not include an accountability measure of student learning. Another issue UNL was facing as a land-grant institution dealt with the transferability of courses from two-year colleges and competition for students from peer institutions. External pressures also came from legislators and other politicians to move students through the system in a reasonable amount of time.
Participants compared internal political pressures of all eight colleges to work together in the development and adoption process of ACE to the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, which required individual states to give up sovereignty. This property included discussion of territoriality among the undergraduate colleges primarily for student credit hour production. As one participant from history explained,

The process reminded me of the approval of the U.S. Constitution. Each state had to approve the Constitution and one state, Rhode Island, was very reluctant to give up its sovereignty for the United States Federal Government and the argument and the debate was in those same frameworks. It is nothing short of a revolution to pass ACE because curricular matters tend to be so complicated because there are so many different groups that have to agree on the goals.

*Economic climate.* The third major intervening condition that influenced the process of ACE was the economic climate at the time when the Chancellor called for general education reform. UNL had been through seven budget cuts in the past 10 years, and the participants were very much aware of the importance of student credit hour production and the generation of grant funding in times of budget cuts. One participant from Arts & Sciences said the following:

The college has made it very clear that there are two things they are looking at. One is student credit hour production and the other one is grant dollars. A department that is not doing so well on both of those in particular is going to be in jeopardy.

It appears that the economic climate has also forced UNL to be more open to transfer hours from other institutions as students are facing a decline in available employment opportunities upon graduation. Some of the participants suggested that the timing of the development and adoption of ACE was not ideal because the university could not provide the financial resources to adequately support a new general education
program that would follow an outcomes-based approach, which requires regular assessment at several different levels.

Almost all of the participants blamed the lack of financial resources on the fact that a) not many faculty typically got involved in general education reform and b) most colleges are concerned about student credit hour production because in their opinion it was positively related to funding, especially funding for Ph.D. programs. Some of the participants indicated that UNL uses an indirect reward system between colleges and the administration. One participant put it this way: “A game goes on around here where, if you scratch my back, I will scratch yours.” Several participants were concerned that the lack of financial resources prevents colleges from a) developing and teaching general education courses, and b) putting their best teachers into general education courses. This issue is discussed in more depth in the “consequences” section.

**Strategies.** The purpose of grounded theory research is to develop an “inductive model of theory development grounded in views from participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 239). The strategies that individuals use to handle situations and problems that they are facing are known as actions and interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 133). They happen purposefully and occur through strategies. In other words, individuals are doing something or behaving a certain way in response to the phenomenon. In this study, individuals’ strategies revolved around the power of individuals to generate ideas, negotiate solutions, and implement a new general education program. Their strategies furthermore depended on their level of involvement in the process. The faculty could be divided into four distinct categories in terms of their involvement in ACE:

- those who did not get involved at all,
• those who were passively involved but informed enough to vote,
• those who were actively involved and shared their opinions publicly in open forums, and
• those who were actively involved in the process itself because they were appointed to serve on one of the ACE committees (either during the development phase or the implementation phase)

It appears that at a large research-extensive university faculty engagement in general education reform is very low because faculty are “pulled into too many different directions.” The pressure to produce research and bring in grant money forces most faculty on the tenure track to choose research over curriculum matters. In addition, there was no reward structure in place to reward faculty at-large for getting involved in general education reform. One participant from Business Administration explained,

Most of the faculty in our college are primarily concerned about their specific content areas. I will spend 23.5 hours of my day trying to make myself the best I can be to give the best to my students, my research time and therefore general education is somebody else’s thing. I don’t have interest because I don’t have time. Also, there was no incentive in terms of tenure, promotion, or money. Nobody’s job performance is in anyway tied to general education.

Therefore, the primary strategy that faculty used to respond to the phenomenon of general education reform at UNL was to do nothing. Many of the participants who were approached to participate in this study said that they simply did not know enough about general education in general and the ACE reform process in particular. As one participant from Arts & Sciences observed, “Most people just ignored it. Faculty take pride in the fact that they don’t know if there is general education or not, which says something about our institution.”

However, many faculty appeared to be aware of the process because of the discourse that took place during the development, adoption, population, and
implementation of ACE. Despite the fact that most tenure track faculty seemed to focus primarily on research, some of them considered themselves interested in general education and followed the different phases of ACE so that they could be informed enough to vote on the proposals. Several participants explained that they learned about ACE from a variety of different sources: “You were getting the same information from multiple sources ranging from the university level to communications coming from the Dean’s Office to communications coming from our department chair.” The strategy of these individuals was to trust individuals they respected, like their senator, department chair or ACE committee representative to explain what was happening in the reform process and how the information should be interpreted. A participant from Fine & Performing Arts explained that her department’s representative from one of the ACE committees would meet with the faculty not only to share what was happening in the reform process but also to take their opinions back to the committee:

   He was really invested in the process and we basically trusted him. We were happy that he was reporting to us and we wanted to hear what was going on and wanted to offer our suggestions and we asked him what he thought and he would tell us and we would agree with him.

   Although most faculty were either only passively or not at all involved in the process, there was a large enough group of faculty from almost all of the colleges who were actively involved in the process without having been appointed to serve on one of the committees. These individuals seemed to display the highest level of distrust toward the administration as well as those faculty who were serving on the committees. They tended to respect the leadership of the committees but distrusted the level of expertise on the committees, especially the committee that certified the courses. “You want people
who understand the curriculum and who aren’t there to validate their point of view.

There seemed to be thriving terrorist activity on the university committee. If you don’t pass this for my college I’m going to shoot down everything your college proposes.”

These individuals cared tremendously about general education, teaching, and curriculum development and many of them were either department heads or curriculum committee chairs. One participant from Arts & Sciences summed it up this way:

You start with what you have and what is possible and the whole thing needs to be couched in terms of what is best for the students. What is best given what we have and who are the people who know the curriculum, who really care about undergraduate education. And there are legitimate people who don’t care about undergraduate education because they have other stuff to do but there are those of us who are interested in undergraduate education. Get the right people involved, start with looking at what other peer institution our size did instead of looking at what small private institutions have done, and go slow.

This quote also illustrates that this group of faculty were not convinced that the approach the GEAC/GEPT committees took when developing ACE was the best. They were aware that the committees started with a clear mandate from the administration of what they needed to accomplish. Participants that fell into this group of faculty indicated that the framework for ACE was the AAC&U LEAP program, which administrators were able to convince the committee to use for ACE despite the fact that many members on the committee were skeptical. The strategy this group of faculty used in response to the reform process was to take advantage of the open forums, speak up about the reform process at those meetings as well as back in their departments, and decide to either promote ACE during the adoption phase or convince colleagues to vote against it. There was no pattern that emerged in terms of who became promoters and who became
obstructionists. It seemed that it depended on each individual’s philosophies about general education and how it should be approached.

The final group of faculty were those who were actively involved in the process because they serving on one or more of the committees that developed and populated ACE. For the most part they described the collegiality on the committees and the chemistry that existed among faculty members. One participant from Business Administration said,

I am absolutely amazed that we have a general education program that includes courses that have been accepted by all eight colleges. No one knows any other instance of that ever being able to happen.

They, themselves became some of the most influential participants of ACE and acted as liaisons between the committees and the college or department they represented. The strategy they used was to be as open and transparent as possible and to communicate with those outside the committee clearly and frequently. They spoke very positively about the leadership of the committees as well as their colleagues who served on them.

**Consequences.** According to Strauss & Corbin (1998), consequences or outcomes are the results of actions and interactions taken (or not taken) in response to an “issue or a problem or to manage or maintain a certain situation” (p. 134). This section explains how certain consequences affect the reform process as perceived by the faculty.

The main consequence or “outcome” of this theoretical model was a new outcomes-based general education program rooted in AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative. Along with this primary outcome of the reform process, several consequences occurred from the perception of faculty. These consequences included the effects of the new program on the overall quality of education,
its promise to meet the assessment/accountability mandate imposed by North Central Accreditation, its sustainability given the lack of resources to support it, as well as its marketability in an effort to increase or maintain student enrollment.

**Quality of education.** Participants spoke about the quality of education students would receive under ACE both positively and negatively. Most participants acknowledged that the focus of the new general education program is on student learning because it is an outcomes-based program. They recognized that the assessment will bring stability and coherence to the program, especially when compared to the previous general education program. “With ACE we’re looking for students to develop competency in certain areas that can be quantified.” One participant from Journalism and Mass Communications said, “I think the prime benefit is that [ACE] got a lot of people to rewrite their courses so we are addressing student learning outcomes and not simply teaching a subject.” An additional benefit of ACE in terms of the quality of teaching was that ACE requires student learning outcomes that were not part of the previous program, specifically the capstone experience and the ethics, stewardship, and civics outcome.

At the same time, many participants also talked about the negative effects ACE may have on the quality of general education. They were concerned about the small number of credit hours that are required under ACE (30) as opposed to CEP (57), shifting the focus of students’ education toward the major instead of a liberal arts education. Some participants characterized the new program as the “lowest common denominator” of the kind of skills and abilities every student should have. One participant from Arts & Sciences said,
There are fewer requirements [...] and I’m not sure that’s a good thing. I know that students in other colleges will get less of a liberal arts education because of this. They will get more of a vocational focused education and I think that is a loss.

Another consequence of ACE that was described both positively and negatively by participants was that under the new program students could take courses in colleges that have traditionally not been “providers” of general education, such as the College of Business Administration, the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, and the College of Architecture. Participants indicated that those colleges could contribute significantly to the general education of any student but also stated that those colleges often are not able to due to lack of funding to teach them. On the other hand, several participants pointed out that ACE doesn’t require students to take general education courses outside of their major. They predicted that many students will take as many courses as they can within the their major because it is convenient and efficient, as many of those courses also count toward the major. ACE allows students to take up to three courses from one department, which was also the case under CEP. However, as one participant from Architecture pointed out, because fewer total hours are required in the new general education program, the percentage of ACE courses that students can take within the College of Architecture can be up to 70 percent, which “is not what we really want.” Another problem related to the quality of education that participants pointed out was the transferability issue. While all ACE-certified courses must be assessed, their transfer equivalencies from other institutions will be accepted as ACE credit without requiring assessment. Several participants predicted that this issue may affect student enrollment:
The single biggest issue is that there is no good system for dealing with transfer courses and this is an enormous challenge that we probably just can’t do anything about. We may find that we are losing student credit hours because it is easier for a student to go somewhere else during the summer and take a course that is not held to ACE standards and then transfer it in as an ACE course rather than taking that course here.

**Accountability.** Another consequence of the reform process was that the new general education program promised to be accountable for student learning because of the built-in program-level assessment piece. Each semester an ACE course is taught instructors of certified courses must collect a reasonable number of student samples that demonstrate the achievement of the particular learning outcome for which the course is certified. ACE furthermore stipulates that every five years each of the outcomes must be assessed at the department, college, and institutional level. Almost all of the participants agreed that the assessment component of ACE gave the program a measure of accountability that did not exist in the previous program. “It adds an accountability that was largely impossible given the complexities of the CEP program and the variation of one college to the next and terms of how thoroughly engaged in the process they were.”

However, many of the participants, especially from Arts & Sciences, worried about the burden the assessment component would place on faculty who were already stretched to the limit, as well as on departments. Several of the participants indicated that they knew faculty who had already announced that they would have their courses decertified because of the burden the assessment places on faculty. On the other hand, participants from the other colleges, especially those in professional colleges that are accredited by different accrediting bodies that already require assessment, felt that ACE assessment was not a significant burden.
**Sustainability.** Another consequence that participants talked about frequently was sustainability of the program in terms of assessment and funding. One participant from Arts & Sciences said, “It requires so much work upfront on so many things that I do worry that it may be awhile before we can do all of it well and whether as a campus we can really follow through on the promise.” Department chairs of departments that are offering a large number of sections of general education courses were concerned about program-level assessment as ACE requires significant planning and coordination of all instructors teaching courses. One participant from Journalism and Mass Communications directly linked the program’s level of sustainability to its lifespan. “It’s much easier to start something than it is to sustain it. If people are doing a good job sustaining the program it can be around for twenty years.” When asked how the program could be sustained he suggested that faculty who contribute to the general education process should be supported, not just monetarily but also in terms of work that is valued in the reward structure.

**Marketability.** Although it was too soon to determine whether ACE would affect student enrollment, many of the participants talked about ACE’s ease-of-use both among students as well as faculty:

- “It’s a lot easier to advise students, so all of the things that make it beneficial for students make it good for us.”
- “It’s elegant and it’s simple. It’s just so much more straightforward.”
- “ACE seems like it’s more understandable and manageable from a faculty perspective.”
- “It is clear to me watching our majors that it is a more attractive general education program. We have a lot of majors that are switching.”

Marketability was an important consequence of the new general education program, especially in terms of student recruitment. One participant explained,
I think that the ACE program is going to benefit us in the future in many ways. One way is that we have a program to point to when we do student recruiting and say that this is a nationally recognized program, and unlike other universities we have a program that is really state-of-the-art for general education that builds into assessment.

At the same time, some participants pointed out that ACE’s ease-of-use and efficiency is only an illusion because several colleges, including Arts & Sciences, added an additional distribution requirement to ACE adding more writing courses, sciences, and history.

I’d say the differences [between ACE and CEP] are minimal. The final outcome of ACE is a regenerated distribution list. I think it’s a little easier on the students because there are fewer hours required and there is no IS component, but I think it’s basically the exact same thing.

**The paradigm model.** The theoretical model developed in this chapter suggests that a set of causal conditions (internal and external pressures) shape a phenomenon (phases of general education reform at a research-extensive university), while the context (faculty buy-in, leadership, and timeline) as well as intervening conditions (institutional culture, campus politics, and the economic climate) influence the strategies (faculty involvement in the process and power of individuals) to bring about a set of consequences (a new outcomes-based general education program that is a reflection of the mission of a research-extensive university). The reform process is expressed graphically as a cycle (Appendix F) because several of the participants thought that any general education program would never be permanent and would be revised after a certain number of years.
**Selective Coding**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that selective coding is the “process of integrating and refining the theory” (p. 161). Integration means that categories are interrelated and organized around a “central explanatory concept” (p. 161). The goal is to “validate those relationships and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 161). Selective coding involved several steps that occurred simultaneously. The first step was to identify the central explanatory core category by asking, “what the research is all about” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 148). At this point the researcher was trying to distance herself from the data by asking, “What is the main problem with which the participants are grappling?” These were generally issues that emerged from the data repeatedly even though participants may not have mentioned them directly. After the central core category was identified, major categories were related to it by identifying and stating how they related to the core. These two steps were accomplished by writing a storyline that integrates the core explanatory category with the other major categories. The theory was then refined by “trimming off excess and filling in poorly developed categories” (p. 161) and validated by comparing it against the data.

The central explanatory core category that emerged was “Phases of General Education Reform at a Research-Extensive University.” The central category emerged from the phenomenon (“Phases of General Education Reform”) but during selective coding it became clear that participants differentiated between general education reform at a research-extensive university as opposed to a smaller, liberal arts college, whose mission is typically less focused on research and more on teaching. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that a central category should meet certain criteria. For example, all other
major categories should relate to it, which they do as can be gleaned from the storyline that follows. In addition, the central category appears frequently in the data. All of the participants spoke about the fact that it was difficult to get involved in general education reform because they were engaged in other activities that are valued more at a research-extensive university, such as conducting research and bringing in grants. In addition, when the categories are related, the explanation that evolves should be logical and consistent. The name of the central category should be abstract so that additional research can be conducted in other areas to advance theory development. By refining the name of the central category with the addition of “at a research-extensive university” additional research can be focused on this type of institution, which involves different educational challenges and opportunities when compared to other types of institutions. Refining the category analytically through integration with other concepts the theory should grow in explanatory power. Finally, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that the central category be able to explain variation in the data, so that when conditions change, the explanation still holds even though the way in which the phenomenon is expressed may vary. Furthermore, the researcher should be able to explain contradictory cases in terms of the central category. Phases of General Education Reform at a Research-Extensive University as the central category indicates that general education reform at UNL was highly influenced by the nature of the institution and mainly served as a cyclical process of revisiting and fine-tuning the institution’s general education program in response to internal and external pressures.

**The story.** The causal conditions that affected the phases of general education reform at a research-extensive university included both internal and external pressures
and a perceived need by both faculty and administrators to create a more “user-friendly” general education program. External pressures such as assessment mandates, accreditation requirements, and competition from other institutions motivated the administration to call for a new general education program, while internal pressures such as a non-functioning, “unwieldy” previous general education program as well as transferability issues motivated faculty to entertain the thought of evaluating and perhaps changing the program.

The causal conditions and a failed attempt to revise the previous general education program set the parameters for the new curriculum. From the faculty perspective, the administration determined that the new program ought to be assessable, while also simplifying the general education requirements for students so that the new program could support the university’s recruitment and retention efforts. However, several intervening conditions affected the impact of the causal conditions on the new general education program. Faculty described the institutional culture at a large, land-grant, research-extensive university as one that values both research and teaching, but that rewards achievements in research more than achievements in undergraduate teaching. The focus on research, then, inhibited many faculty from participating more actively in the reform process. Instead, they relied on others to develop the program, to inform departments of the reform process, and at times to recommend whether to vote in favor or against the program. Campus politics also affected the impact of the causal conditions. Although the faculty generally agreed that the previous general education program needed to at least be revised, they were concerned about the new program’s impact on student credit hours production and subsequent funding. The economic climate
was the third intervening condition. The lack of resources to support the new program emerged as the primary concern about ACE because faculty believed that funding was needed to (1) teach the new general education courses in small classes, (2) provide incentives for instructors to develop new general education courses, and (3) support meaningful assessment activities.

“Phases of general education reform at a research-extensive university” consists of five distinct phases: (1) Call for change, (2) Appointing the Committee, (3) Developing the program, (4) Adopting the program, and (5) Populating the program. Although faculty were heavily involved in the last four phases of general education reform, the perception of the faculty was that it was administrators who called for a brand-new general education program using a top-down approach. They also noticed that the administration was actively involved in all five phases of the reform process. During the last four steps, several powerful individuals held key positions, some as representatives on one or more of the committees and others as independent promoters, facilitators, and communicators during various phases of the reform process.

Several contextual conditions affected the strategies that faculty used during the general education reform process. The property “faculty buy-in” ranked from low to high. Most faculty bought into the idea of general education reform but were disappointed by some decisions that were made that seemed to ignore faculty concerns. On the other hand, many faculty believed that they had plenty of opportunities to get involved in the process but decided to instead focus on other work the university rewarded more. They raised questions and voiced their concerns mostly during departmental meetings and trusted their ACE representative to speak on their behalf during meetings and open
forums. As the level of faculty buy-in changed, so did their decision to vote for or against the program. Faculty buy-in was closely related to leadership as another contextual condition. Several leaders emerged during the process, who were highly influential during the adoption phase of ACE. Finally, the aggressive timeline focused on getting the new program up and running much faster than most faculty would have liked. The result was a new general education program that achieved – at least on paper – the parameters that had been set by the causal conditions, but that may have been compromised in terms of quality of education.

Different levels of faculty involvement and the power of individuals were important strategies in the reform process to generate ideas, negotiate solutions, and implement the new program. Most faculty chose not to get involved, while others were just informed enough to vote either for or against the new program. Others were passionately involved in the process by sharing their opinions and voicing their concerns because they had a personal interest in general education. A small group of faculty was actively involved in the reform process because they were serving on one or more of the ACE committees that developed/populated the program.

A new outcomes-based general education program rooted in AAC&U’s LEAP initiative was the main outcome that resulted from moving through the phases of general education reform at a research-extensive university. Along with the main outcome, several consequences occurred as viewed by faculty. The quality of education was a consequence that faculty were concerned about first and foremost. They were divided into two “camps”: those who believed that the reform process improved the quality and those who believed it lowered it. The faculty who believed that the quality of education
would be improved tied their opinion to another consequence: the new program’s accessibility. Although most faculty agree that assessment is an important step in monitoring student learning, they questioned whether meaningful assessment at the course, program, and institutional level is possible both philosophically and practically. On the other end of the spectrum were those who believed that – despite best intentions – ACE inadvertently became the “lowest common denominator” in terms of the quality of learning primarily because of the reduced number of required hours, the fact that a large percentage of ACE courses can be taken in one’s major, and the inability to keep all general education courses small with the institution’s best instructors as teachers.

This perspective was related to another consequence: sustainability. Faculty recognized the limits of ACE as it was developed, adopted, and implemented and believed that those limits were the direct result of the lack of funding to support the new program financially. The motivation behind general education reform is different for faculty and administrators. While faculty are mostly concerned with their students’ quality of education, they believe that administrators are motivated by another consequence: marketability. Marketability means creating a program that is conducive to student recruitment and retention, which in turn, affects the university’s ability to provide funding. Thus, the consequences of general education reform are interrelated and require sacrifices and compromises of different motivations and beliefs of those who are involved in the process if the goal is to create a new outcomes-based general education program at a research-extensive, public university. Faculty viewed the reform process as cyclical, meaning that it has a life cycle that includes phases of development, adoption,
implementation, growth, and decline, which eventually will lead to the next call for review and possibly change.

**Theoretical propositions.** As a result of the theoretical model and the storyline the researcher formulated a series of theoretical propositions of how and why the general education reform process occurred at a research-extensive university as perceived by faculty. The theoretical propositions have been grounded in the data of this study:

1. From the faculty perspective, the general education reform process at a research-extensive, public university occurs in phases, including Calling for Change, Appointing the Committee, Developing the Program, Adopting the Program, and Populating the Program.

1.1. The process is sequential in nature, meaning that one phase leads into the next, with some phases overlapping.

1.2. The process is cyclical in nature, meaning that it has a life cycle that eventually requires a new reform unless it can be flexible to allow the program to evolve.

1.3. The call for change is driven by the administration. Reform driven entirely by the faculty is inefficient.

1.4. A small committee consisting of faculty and administrators is appointed to generate a set of proposals for a new outcomes-based general education program. An advisory committee consisting of faculty and administrators is appointed to act as the liaison between the smaller colleges and the campus community. Not all colleges are represented on the two committees.

1.5. Each college votes on the set of proposals in a two-step process. Each college must approve the proposals before the new program can be adopted.
1.6. A new committee consisting of faculty representatives from each college is appointed to populate the new general education program. Each representative must vote in favor of the course proposals before each course is considered “certified.”

2. Based on faculty perception, faculty buy-in influences the phases of general education reform at a research-extensive university.

2.1. Faculty who teach mostly undergraduate courses buy into general education reform more than faculty who teach mostly graduate-level courses.

2.2. Non-tenured faculty buy into general education reform less than tenured faculty.

2.3. If the reform process is perceived to be faculty-driven, faculty buy-in is larger than if it is perceived to be administration-driven.

2.4. If the new general education program is perceived to be an improvement over the previous program, faculty buy-in is larger.

2.5. If students buy into the new general education program, faculty are more likely to buy into it as well.

2.6. Faculty buy-in increases if respected and trusted colleagues (“change agents”) are directly involved in the development.

2.7. Faculty buy-in decreases if administrators dominate the reform process.

3. According to faculty, the leadership of key individuals shapes the phases of general education reform at a research-extensive university.

3.1. The reform process will move through its phases when key administrators support, but not dictate the process.
3.1.1. If key administrators who have expertise in general education facilitate the different phases of general education reform, the probability of implementing a new general education program increases.

3.1.2. If key administrators dictate the parameters of the different phases of general education reform, the probability of implementing a new program decreases.

3.2. The reform process will move through its phases when key deliberating bodies, such as the Faculty Senate, the University Curriculum Committee, and the Academic Planning Committee, support the process.

3.2.1. If deliberating bodies assume a supporting role during the different phases of general education reform, the probability of implementing a new general education program increases.

3.2.2. If the deliberating bodies assume a developmental role during the different phases of general education reform, the probability of implementing a new general education program decreases.

3.3. The reform process will move through its phases when key faculty become involved in the process.

3.3.1. If the committees charged with developing and populating the new general education program include faculty who have broad expertise in the area and who have earned the trust and respect of their colleagues, the probability of implementing a new general education program increases.

3.3.2. Faculty who are not serving on either one of the committees but who have broad expertise in the area and who are well respected by the colleagues,
have the power to become change agents who can affect the vote positively or negatively.

3.4. The reform process will move through its phases when Deans support but not dominate the process.

3.4.1. If academic Deans encourage the reform process by appointing knowledgeable faculty to the developing and populating committees and by encouraging discussion of the reform process within their respective colleges, the probability of implementing a new general education program increases.

3.4.2. If academic Deans use their power to influence the faculty vote, faculty buy-in to the new program will decrease.

4. From a faculty perspective, the timeline of the general education reform process affects faculty feelings toward and buy-in to the reform process of the new general education program.

4.1. Administrators are unrealistic about setting an appropriate timeline for the different phases of general education reform, which influences how faculty feel about the process.

4.1.1. When the timeline is too aggressive during the development phase, faculty feel that their voices are not heard.

4.1.2. When the timeline is too aggressive during the adoption phase, faculty feel rushed into making a decision that is irreversible.
4.1.3. When the timeline is too aggressive during the population phase, faculty get frustrated because the time commitment to submit courses is too intense.

4.2. Faculty buy-in during the adoption phase increases when they believe that revisions can be made to proposals at a later time.

4.3. Faculty buy-in after the adoption phases decreases when the timeline is too short to allow adequate time for revisions and additional discussions.

5. According to faculty, institutional culture, campus politics and the economic climate affect the phases of general education reform at a research-extensive, public university.

5.1. The institutional culture determines the way faculty and administrators engage in the general education reform process.

5.1.1. The mission of the institution affects the level of involvement of faculty in the reform process. If involvement in general education reform is not rewarded, faculty are less likely to participate in the process.

5.1.2. The level of collegiality among the undergraduate colleges influences the outcome of the general education process. The more collegial the culture, the higher the probability of developing, adopting, and populating the new program. The more managerial the culture, the lower the probability of developing, adopting, and populating the new program.

5.1.3. The colleges’ respective governing structures provide the framework for developing, adopting, and populating the new program.

5.2. Campus politics affect the general education reform process.
5.2.1. External politics such as the need to create a program that is compatible in terms of transferability of courses from other institutions in the state and to move student through the program efficiently influence the design and implementation of the program.

5.2.2. Internal politics such as territoriality among colleges and departments in terms of student credit hour production and other funding priorities influence the design and implementation of the program.

5.2.2.1. If colleges and departments perceive that they will lose student credit hours or other funding sources, they will protect their territory.

5.2.2.2. If colleges and departments protect their territory instead of focusing on the institutional interest, the probability of designing, adopting, and populating a new general education program will decrease.

5.3. The economic climate shapes the phases of the general education program reform process.

5.3.1. If the perceived need for general education reform is high, faculty are more willing to compromise on the quality of the new general education program.

5.3.2. If the perceived need for general education reform is high, the more likely faculty are to give up territoriality.
5.3.3. The more critical the financial situation, the less likely faculty are to engage in general education reform and the more likely they are to focus on research and bringing in grant funding.

5.3.4. The more critical the financial situation, the more likely colleges and departments are to engage in general education reform because they hope to gain financial resources.

6. Based on faculty perceptions, the power of key individuals affects the level of faculty involvement in the reform process, which is the strategy that is used to generate ideas, negotiate solutions, and implement a new general education program. There are four level of involvement, including, “no involvement,” “passive, informed involvement,” “active, informed involvement,” and “active ‘change agent’ involvement.”

6.1. At research-extensive, public universities most faculty are not involved in the reform process.

6.2. At research-extensive, public universities quite a few faculty are passively involved in the reform process and trust key individuals’ opinions when deciding how to vote.

6.3. At research-extensive, public universities a few faculty are actively involved in the reform process because they are personally interested in general education. These individuals may become change agents that affect other faculty in the voting decision-making process. They are more likely than any other group to distrust the administration and to be critical of the committees that are developing and populating the new program. If their voices are heard and
acknowledged, the probability of adopting a new general education program increases.

6.4. At research-extensive, public universities a few key faculty are actively involved in the reform process by serving on one or more of the committees that are developing and/or populating the program. If they have earned the trust and respect of their colleagues, the probability of developing and adopting a new general education program increases.

7. According to faculty, the consequences of general education reform eventually evolve into internal and external pressures that will mark the end of the general education program’s life cycle and require a new reform process.

7.1. If the general education program is not adequately funded, the quality of education, accountability, sustainability, and marketability of the program will erode.

7.2. If the general education program is adequately funded, its life cycle can be extended.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The concepts underlying the theoretical model of “Phases of General Education Reform at a Research-Extensive, Public University” have been well documented in the literature. For example, organizational and educational change, institutional culture, as well as shared governance in institutions of higher education have produced a body of literature that is well established and that has been reflected in the literature about general education reform. However, few studies have focused on the process of general education reform from a faculty perspective, and even fewer have concentrated on research-extensive, public universities.

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory for institutional change that explains the process and implementation of “Achievement-Centered Education” (ACE), a new general education program from the faculty perspective at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. No theory currently exists that explains the process of general education reform at a doctoral/research-extensive university. Grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was applied in this study of cultural change. In addition, this study focused on describing the reform process from a faculty perspective, as faculty at public institutions are responsible for the curriculum. A theoretical model was developed as a result of 29 in-depth interviews with faculty from eight undergraduate colleges whose students and faculty are affected by the general education program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
The model that emerged from the data included six distinct sequential phases that were cyclical in nature. The paradigm started with internal and external pressures that were causal conditions that led to the call for educational change. The call for change was the first step of the phenomenon of general education reform, followed by the appointment of a developing committee of general education experts, the development of the program, the adoption of the program by all eight undergraduate colleges, and finally the population of the program, during which another representative committee certified a set of general education courses using a rigorous review process. The phenomenon was influenced by several contextual conditions, such as the level of faculty buy-in, the leadership of key individuals on campus, as well as an aggressive timeline. In addition, the reform process was shaped by a set of intervening conditions, including institutional culture, campus politics, as well as a tough economic climate during which the reform process took place. Faculty used a variety of different strategies in response to the phases of general education reform that centered on different levels of involvement in the process. Depending on the level of faculty involvement in the process faculty responded to the power of individual change agents in different ways. The outcomes or consequences of general education reform at a research-extensive, public university completed the paradigm. The consequences included different views of the quality of education as a result of the reform process, as well as the accountability, sustainability, and marketability of the program, and will eventually become components of causal conditions that will start the reform process anew. The different components of the paradigm are consistent with the literature about organizational and educational change. For example, Tierney (1988) developed a framework for the study of cultural change in
higher education that includes the following six areas: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership. With the exception of “socialization,” all of those areas are reflected in the paradigm model proposed in this study.

The Change Process

The reform process at UNL was in many ways consistent with the findings of a study that investigated the design and implementation of general education programs throughout New England (Arnold & Civian, 1997). For example, Arnold and Civian point out that success of general education reform is related to the way the process is structured from the beginning. At UNL, the initial developing committee (GEAC and GEPT) included not only faculty but also administrators and students. Although some of the participants in this study firmly believed that those committees should have been “faculty-only” committees because the charge dealt with the curriculum, most participants acknowledged that administrators were a key component because they facilitated the process. Arnold and Civian furthermore state that this type of organizational change can have tremendous philosophical and political implications for the institution, which is also consistent with the findings of this study. Many faculty actively resisted the process because they were concerned about the redistribution of students among departments, which in turn can have a perceived effect on funding for that particular unit. In addition, Arnold and Civian contend that before the process can begin, an institution must have clear goals for the new general education program that are rooted in the institution’s mission and tailored to the student body. UNL started the process by developing a set of four institutional objectives from which the 10 student
learning outcomes emerged. However, they state that from an organizational-political context, most institutions follow the “path of least resistance” by settling on goals that are “vague and poorly defined” (p. 20). The results of this study indicate that faculty have differing opinions about this issue. Most of them believed that the set of 10 student learning outcomes was not that much different from the existing ones. They liked that the new set included a capstone requirement as well as an ethics course but they disliked the loss of critical thinking as a separate outcome and thought that one writing course was not enough.

One of the themes that emerged early during the study was UNL’s dire need for a more accountable new general education program. Faculty recognized that institutions cannot prosper if they neglect their “core business,” which is educating students in the twenty-first century. Although a university is clearly not the same as a business, much can be learned from the business world about the process of change, especially since several faculty pointed out that the institution is becoming “more like a business.” The need for change is usually identified when something is no longer working or when a crisis occurs. In the business world an example of a crisis would be a crash of the stock exchange distribution of a tainted product that causes harm to consumers. In education, a crisis could be a failed general education program. In the case of UNL, most faculty agreed that the previous general education program had run its course. They described it as “unwieldy” and “difficult to understand,” and some faculty described it as “fraud” because it had no built-in accountability measure.

Noll (2001) argues that change should be accompanied by a clear action plan that should use the following steps: (1) identifying a course of action and allocating resources
to achieve the organization’s change goals; (2) designating authority, responsibility, and relationship that will drive the change efforts; (3) determining a leader who will guide the change effort and defining the role and responsibilities of that individual; (4) describing the procedures and processes that will facilitate the implementation of change; (5) identifying the training that is required to incorporate the change process into key individuals’ working processes; and (6) identifying the equipment and tools necessary to affect change. While Noll’s model describes organizational change in a business setting, it bears some resemblance as well as some differences to the paradigm model that emerged from this study. While the process starts with identifying a course of action, the business paradigm clearly states that resources must be allocated at the beginning to accomplish the change goals. The absence of available resources in the educational version of the model is blatant and emerged as a source of frustration and anxiety among faculty. The second step, designating authority, was already in place in the educational model as the institution had a decentralized governing structure that resided with the eight undergraduate colleges. The business model requires that an individual be identified as a leader who will guide the change process. This step is similar in the educational model. The chair of the developing committee was a key individual in the reform process who was well respected by his peers but had institutional integrity at the same time. In addition, this study showed that additional key individuals needed to be appointed to drive the development as well as population of the new general education program. Some key individuals emerged during the process who were not part of either one of the committees, but their roles were nevertheless important, especially during the adoption phase of the process. In the business model the procedures and processes that will help
guide the implementation of the change are determined by managements, which was only partially the case during the general education reform process at UNL. The developing committees were charged with creating an outcomes-based general education program by the administration, but it was the committee that also developed the procedures and processes for adoption and implementation of the new program. The last step in the business model of change identifies the tools and equipment needed to make the proposed change possible. This is a step that was perhaps neglected during the overall process of general education reform. One of the outcomes faculty are most concerned with is the sustainability of the new program. They were concerned that not enough resources were made available to help with the heavy assessment requirement of the program. Another area of frustration among some faculty were problems with technology during the submission process of courses for the purpose of certification, as well as during the time they collected student samples of work for assessment purposes.

Noll furthermore contends that many organizational changes are driven by top management, a strategy that is often unsuccessful because it fails to integrate those individuals who will be affected by the proposed change (Noll, 2001). Shared responsibility of change can be achieved in several different ways that involve top levels and lower levels of the organization working together. For example, top management can define the problem and then use external groups to gather information and develop solutions. Another way is for top management to define the problem but for lower level task forces to develop solutions. The idea is that those who are affected by change are closer to the situation and are therefore well equipped to contribute to the solution. In addition, this type of process tends to create a deeper sense of ownership and
involvement. A third way is to appoint task forces composed of people from all levels of the organization to define the problems, to collect information about the problems of the organization, and to develop solutions. This approach usually results in the most commitment among members but also is the slowest to develop solutions (Noll, 2001). In the case of general education reform at UNL, faculty perceived the call for change to have come from “top management” (the administration), while the solution to the problem (a dysfunctional general education program) was developed by a “task force” composed of “people from all levels of the institution,” including faculty, administrators, and students. Noll (2001) explains that some of the reactions to change in an organization include denial, passive resistance, and active resistance, which is consistent with the findings of this study. Faculty involvement occurred at one of four levels with most faculty not being actively involved in the reform process.

The literature also identified specific reasons why transformation efforts can fail (Kotter, 1998). These reasons include not establishing a great enough sense for urgency, not creating a powerful enough guiding coalition, lacking a vision, undercommunicating the vision, not removing obstacles to the new vision, not systematically planning for and creating short-term wins, declaring victory too soon, and not anchoring changes in the corporate culture. “Until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are subject to degradation as soon as the pressure for change is removed” (p. 18). The results of this study showed that the institution did everything it could to help the transformation succeed. For example, the sense of urgency for a better general education program was communicated through the Chancellor and other key individuals. The initial developing committee was a strong “guiding coalition” that many faculty praised for
hashing out the details of the new program, while putting the institution’s needs before individuals’, colleges’ or departments’ needs. Although many faculty were concerned about the aggressive timeline of the reform process, the committee had a clear vision and effectively communicated that vision. This is where the GEAC committee played an important role. It became the “pipeline of information” between the main planning committee (GEPT) and the campus community. Another important strategy was to plan for “small wins.” The four proposals that were developed were voted on in a two-step process. The first two proposals outlined the framework of the new program, including a new set of institutional objectives and student learning outcomes. Once the first two proposals were approved by all eight colleges, the committees developed the last two proposals that outlined how the program would be implemented. All eight colleges voted again on the second set of proposals. The reason for the two-step vote was to move the overall process forward by having the overall structure in place before any other decisions would be made. The only problem that arose was that faculty were told that changes could be made to the proposals. Although some changes were made to the working of the outcomes after the first vote, faculty thought that the short timeline did not allow for revisions and additional discussions. Kotter’s last point, anchoring changes in the culture of the institution, was another important reason why the change process moved forward. UNL, as a public research-extensive institution, has a decentralized power structure that leaves most of the decision making to each of the eight colleges. The decision was made that all eight colleges would have to agree to adopt and implement the new program and to certify courses unanimously. Leaders of the reform process recognized that, culturally speaking, the new program would only work if all of the eight
colleges were equal partners in the reform process because it reflected the culture of the institution.

**Institutional Culture**

Educational change generally promotes social, economic, and cultural transformation during times of global change (Sahlberg, 2003). In recent years, the focus of educational change has shifted from restructuring single components of general education programs to transforming the institution’s culture. This change no longer occurs as a linear process but instead draws from sciences of chaos and complexity (Sahlberg, 2003). So how can change be sustainable in a fast-paced environment? Fullan (2003) describes eight complex change lessons that are rooted in complexity theory. Some of the core elements of chaos and complexity theory are non-linearity, which is the realization that educational reforms do not necessarily occur as intended. This was also true to some extent for UNL’s general education reform efforts. Although the phases occurred sequentially, the adoption phase required more than one voting attempt in two colleges before the program was adopted unanimously. In the case of the College of Arts & Sciences, the Dean appointed an ad hoc committee to revise some of the components of the first two proposals before faculty voted in favor of it. Non-linearity is related to interaction, meaning that several key elements are moving toward order. They are also unpredictable because they are part of dynamically, interactive forces. UNL took a risk when it decided that all decisions required a positive vote from each college. In that sense, the outcome of the reform process was unpredictable. However, the institutional culture and collegiality among faculty and colleges contributed to the adoption and
population of ACE. Fullan explains that auto-catalysis occurs when systems interact with each other to create new patterns in a symbiotic relationship. Faculty and administrators realized that in order for the new general education program to work, all eight colleges had to work together, make compromises, and agree on the final outcome. This symbiotic relationship of colleges forms the institutional culture are UNL, and, according to most participants, will benefit students. “Social attractors” can be defined as motivators that have the ability to create temporary patterns of order as larger systems emerge. This is an element that became crucial in the voting process. Faculty voted on the first two proposals although many of them thought they were flawed. However, they also knew that without approving the first set of proposals the momentum to develop and approve the second set of approvals might have been lost. When small numbers of key forces join together, they create the butterfly effect, which can have disproportionately large effects. The butterfly effect occurred when each of the colleges voted on the proposals, even though the votes did not occur at the same time. Participants talked about the effect of knowing that other colleges had approved the proposals. They were motivated by the positive votes, which gave the new program more credibility with each vote. The final core concept of chaos and complexity theory is that a system can be a complex adaptive system – one that consists of high degrees of internal and external interaction resulting in continuous learning. As the paradigm model shows, the general education reform process is a complex adaptive system that was shaped by several causal, intervening, and contextual conditions.

Fullan’s eight complex change lessons are: (1) give up the idea that the pace of change will slow down; (2) coherence making is a never-ending proposition and is
everyone’s responsibility; (3) changing context is the focus; (4) premature clarity is a
dangerous thing; (5) the public’s thirst for transparency is irreversible; (6) you can’t get
large-scale reform through bottom-up strategies – but beware of the trap; (7) mobilize the
social attractors – moral purpose, quality relationships, quality knowledge; and (8)
charismatic leadership is negatively associated with sustainability. Several of these
lessons apply to the reform process at UNL. For example, the aggressive timeline
emerged as a contextual condition and many faculty believed that the process should
have been slowed down to improve the program itself. However, the administration was
adamant about completing the reform process within a two-year timeframe. Another
lesson is the “public’s thirst for transparency.” Although the program was developed by a
very small committee, a mechanism was put into place to communicate thoughts, results,
and suggestions to and from the faculty at-large. Faculty praised the quantity and quality
of communication from a variety of sources, although some did not believe that their
feedback and suggestions were heard. Another important lesson was to “mobilize the
social attractors.” The developing committee in particular was stacked with individuals
who had the moral purpose to create a better program than the one that was in place
before, who were willing and able to form quality relationships with their colleagues to
work toward a common goal, and who displayed quality knowledge about general
education and undergraduate teaching. It is too early; however, to predict whether
Fullan’s last lesson (charismatic leadership is negatively associated with sustainability)
applies to general education reform at UNL. Sustainability was one of the consequences
of the reform process but faculty associated it primarily with the availability or lack of
funding. They did not link leadership to the sustainability of the program.
Awbrey (2005) argues that general education reform is one of the most challenging and difficult tasks universities can face because it is part of the institution’s cultural fabric. In the 1980s the catalysts for change were changes in academic leadership, declining enrollment, sagging university reputations, faculty desire to educate students in way that reflects faculty views, and departmental competition. In the 1990s, the goal of educational change was to increase general education program coherence but academic leaders often failed to develop shared educational values that could be embedded in the life of the institution. However, in the twenty-first century, the academy recognized that general education reform is not just a task of curricular change but also cultural transformation (Awbrey, 2005). The cultural change that occurs as a result of general education reform can be described as the “iceberg phenomenon” (Selfridge & Sokolik, 1975). The tip is the everyday, apparent operations of the organization, but there is a much deeper, sheltered level of the iceberg that is not immediately visible but crucial to the success of systematic and systemic organizational change. It is the level where institutional culture operates and includes elements that relate to the psychological and social characteristics of an organization. It is important that leaders and stakeholders recognize the iceberg phenomenon to help extend the life cycle of ACE. The tip of the ACE iceberg is the perception that the program is a lot easier to navigate for both students and advisers. On the surface, it is more marketable and “user-friendly,” while also promising to deliver assessable outcomes. However, the cultural change occurs at the sheltered level of the iceberg. Faculty, departments, and colleges must buy into and carry out the assessment requirements for ACE to affect a cultural change. This study found that some faculty display high levels of anxiety about the assessment component, while
others are skeptical and question whether meaningful assessment is even possible at a research-extensive, public university.

Much of this anxiety is tied to funding priorities as well as a reward structure that – from the perspective of faculty – values research more than undergraduate education. This finding is consistent with Cuban’s (1999) work, in which he argues that the structure of research universities supported the focus of research over teaching. Although professors are generally hired to teach they are rewarded to research, mainly because solid research is a source of funding, while teaching is not. The results of this study indicate that if the university can financially and philosophically support the new program, the institutional culture may shift and the program’s life cycle may be extended.

Schein (1984; 1985) identified three levels of organizational culture, including artifacts, values and beliefs, and basic assumptions. Artifacts are behavioral patterns that include language, jargon, programs, and policies. Cultural artifacts often influence change, but Awbrey (2005) warns that if they are changed without regard to the values and beliefs that give them meaning, the change will likely fail. Values and beliefs of an institution often manifest themselves in the type of general education model it chooses: the great books model, the scholarly discipline model, or the effective citizen model (Newton, 2000). The models have different underlying beliefs and value structures in terms of what it means to be an educated person. In the great books model, general education provides the context in the form of classic works from which students draw to address perennial questions of humanity. The model transcends disciplines but has been criticized for its lack of diverse voices. The scholarly discipline model is rooted in the belief that an educated person is a beginning practitioner and that separate disciplines are
the providers of knowledge. The model emphasizes the basic concepts of the chosen discipline as well as methods to solve and analyze problems in the discipline. The main criticism of the model is that it fails to communicate the relevance of the disciplines to students and society and that the focus is more on what is taught than on what is learned (Awbrey, 2005). It appears that UNL’s previous general education program (CEP) fell into the scholarly discipline model. The third model is the effective citizen model (Newton, 2000), which is a hybrid of the previous two models. It views an educated person as someone who is familiar with the ideas of the disciplines and cognizant of their impact on society. This model focuses on student learning and relevance to the “real world,” so that graduates can fully engage in society. It is rooted in a deep belief in assessment and accountability of student learning outcomes and the development of competencies. In addition, it links Dewey’s notion of combining theory and practice (Awbrey, 2005). It appeals to administrators because of its focus on accountability and marketability, as well as to faculty because it gives voice to those areas of academe that have not been part of the classic Western intellectual tradition in the past. While the effective citizen model emphasizes the development of values and skills in addition to knowledge, opponents criticize that it only teaches one particular set of values. Especially those who favor the discipline-based model, in which theory and practice are separated, are critical of the applied knowledge that is emphasized in the effective citizen model (Awbrey, 2005). It seems that ACE falls into the effective citizen model that is rooted in a deep belief in assessment and accountability and that seeks to provide students with learning that is relevant to the “real world” by framing the program in a set of outcomes-based courses that comprise the core curriculum. It is important to note that the findings
of this study show that faculty had different beliefs about which model of general education UNL should develop. Finally, the deepest level of culture includes basic assumptions that guide behavior and actions. Different worldviews have had an impact on what constitutes “knowledge,” and have influenced how universities are structured. During the Renaissance, for example, the great books model was the foundation for knowledge, with the goal being to produce generalists who have a broad range of knowledge. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of science led to the development of specializations and disciplines, reflecting a positivist paradigm, where the appropriate methodology for inquiry is experimentalism. Thus, the discipline-based perspective of general education was favored. More recently, pragmatism, which values relevance, and constructivism, which fuses the researcher and the participant, have started to replace positivism as the dominant paradigm (Awbrey, 2005). Both of these paradigms reflect the effective citizen model of general education in general and ACE in particular.

Awbrey (2005) argues that general education reformers often miss the step of examining the values and assumptions that underlie structural change. One institution that did focus on systematically unveiling its cultural perspectives before undertaking structural changes as part of its general education reform was the University of Michigan-Flint. Previous attempts of general education reform had resulted in faculty complaints of the top-down leadership style that drove the reform and ultimately rendered faculty involvement meaningless (Gano-Phillips & Barnett, 2008). After learning form the AAC&U that “95 percent of general education reform failures are directly linked to failure in process” (Gano-Phillips & Barnett, 2008, p. 36), the university decided to empower the campus community as a whole instead of relying on an appointed
committee to research, design, and propose a new program. A steering committee was created to manage the process of general education reform, but not the content. Another factor that contributed to the University of Michigan-Flint’s success was an active attempt to learn about national trends and best practices in general education. The institution recognized that it had been insulated from the rest of the academic world, which was another cultural problem inhibiting the institution’s progress. The institution also changed its communication patterns because previously “breakdowns in communication had created a subculture of suspicion and secrecy” (Gano-Phillips & Barnett, 2008, p. 39). The steering committee established a regular pattern of communication with frequent updates on progress, encouraging feedback from the campus community. The result of these cultural changes was that nearly one third of the faculty became engaged in the planning process early on, resulting in collective ownership of the plan. At the end of the year-long initiative, almost three-fourths of the faculty voted on the final plan. The reform process at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln followed a similar path. Before a developing committee was formed, a small number of highly respected and knowledgeable faculty and administrators attended a general education workshop hosted by the AAC&U to learn about the latest trends in general education. Based on faculty perceptions captured in this study, it was at this workshop that the idea for an outcomes-based general education program was born. Several individuals who attended the workshop comprised the GEPT committee that was primarily charged with the development of ACE. Arnold and Civian (1997) found that stacking the developing committee with well-respected and highly influential individuals is key. It is an example of how knowledge of a few key individuals can make a big
difference. Members of GEPT well equipped to develop a state-of-the-art program at a research-extensive university, while another committee, GEAC, was in charge of establishing a regular, two-way communication pattern that would update faculty about the progress of the reform process, while taking their suggestions and comments back to GEPT. Although many faculty did not actively participate in the reform process, participants in this study noticed that more faculty were involved than they had anticipated. More importantly, as one participant pointed out, the “right” faculty became involved and not only voted in favor of ACE but also influenced many of their colleagues to do the same. UNL already had a very collegial culture, but not necessarily one in which many faculty cared about teaching and the undergraduate core curriculum. It can be argued that the early set-up of ACE with a heavy emphasis on frequent communication contributed to a cultural shift at UNL in which more faculty became aware of general education reform. Many still looked to the change agents that emerged in their respective departments and colleges to help them make a decision, but overall more faculty appeared to take ownership (faculty buy-in) than expected. While it is difficult to estimate how many faculty ended up voting to adopt ACE, it must be pointed out that each of the eight undergraduate colleges voted in favor of it based on majority rule.

**Political Framework**

Research shows that educational change such as this reform process, is almost always framed as a political process, even when it happens in an apolitical environment (Arnold, 2004; Dubrow, 2004). Kanter, Gamson, and London (1977) warned that the
change process is often negatively affected by political factors that are not directly relevant to the process. These “side issues” include issues such as the new program’s effect on student enrollment, faculty slots, or marketing considerations. However, this study shows that these “side issues” are valid concerns among the faculty, who will have to carry out the new program on a daily basis. It is these “side issues” that are rooted in the political realities of any institution, particularly in a harsh economic climate. Arnold (2004) contends that decision making and planning in academe often appear to be the result of irrational planning, which is known as the “garbage can” principle (Cohen & March, 1986). The reform process at UNL certainly included the discussion of “side issues,” but the results of this and other studies (Dubrow, 2004; Mastera, 1996) show that it is the side issues that have a tremendous impact on the outcome of the reform process. This study in particular showed that faculty needed open forums to “vent” and to let out their frustrations, which were often fueled by “side issues.” Arnold warns that if faculty feel marginalized, disempowered or unheard, general education reform processes can become venues for resolving those situations. In addition, some departments and colleges may use general education reform as a means to accomplish something else. For example, a common reason to become involved is to increase a department’s enrollments and to rev up student credit hour production (Arnold & Civian, 1997). The reform process can also provide symbolic value because it “indicates the importance of particular disciplines in fulfilling the institution’s educational mission” (p. 21). Arnold and Civian point out that it is getting increasingly difficult to find faculty to teach general education courses but much more rare to find departments that do not want to be involved in general education. These issues have potential to become reality at UNL as well. For
example, faculty from two of the professional colleges indicated that they believed their colleges’ involvement in the reform process had symbolic meaning and would help them to play a more important role on campus. The College of Journalism and Mass Communications, for example, put forward many of its courses for ACE certification for strategic reasons, knowing that many of those courses are not even open to non-majors. This study also found that many faculty are concerned about the burden the assessment requirement is placing on them, predicting that many instructors will choose not to teach ACE courses if they have a choice.

**Shared Governance and Faculty Engagement**

Another aspect of educational change that must be discussed in the context of culture is shared faculty governance. The term “governance” in colleges and universities refers to how issues that are affecting the entire institution are decided. It is a process that happens early and involves the structure and formal and informal processes of decision-making groups and the relationships among those groups and individuals (Kezar, 2002). Although governance structures in higher education vary around the world, in the United States the system has generally followed the pattern of democracy, including decentralized, shared governance by representative or collective decision-making. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) collectively issued the 1966 *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, which defined shared governance as “joint efforts in the internal operations of institutions, [whereas] certain decisions fall into the realm of different groups” (Kezar,
Generally, the statement suggests that trustees shall manage the endowment, the president shall maintain and create new resources, and that faculty shall develop the curriculum (American Association of University Professors, 1995). The purpose of shared governance is to “protect and ensure the interest and trust of the institution for the public or for a private group (Kezar, 2002, p. 946). In addition, general education policy as well as long-term plans, budgeting, and presidential selection should be decided jointly. At large masters and doctoral-granting universities, governance often occurs through a representative body such as a faculty senate or other joint committees.

Historically, elected and appointed boards dominated the decision-making process at public and private institutions. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century faculty fought for greater authority in the decision-making process (Kezar, 2002). By the twentieth century faculty became an integral part of shared governance at U.S. institutions. The AAUP developed a set of faculty rights, including the right to be involved in institutional matters related to academic decisions, including research, degree requirements, courses, evaluation of programs, evaluation of faculty, admission, and advising. Students are also often part of the decision-making process, often in the form of a student assembly or senate. In contrast to faculty, however, students rarely have any formal authority but rather provide recommendations on particular issues of which they are stakeholders (Kezar, 2002).

The Faculty Senate is probably the most common body for faculty involvement as part of the shared governance model. Senators are elected to their positions and represent their respective colleges and departments. In addition, some institutions have developed joint committees of faculty, students, and administrators that develop recommendations
on key issues affecting the university and its constituents. Often, these committees are appointed and administered by the Faculty Senate. Areas in which policy setting is required include the mission, strategic direction, selection processes for administrators, faculty, and staff, budgeting, construction of buildings, decisions related to academic programs, promotion and tenure, salary increases, research, student matters, grants, contracts, parking, security, and other services (Kezar, 2002). This study showed that the Faculty Senate was involved initially in trying to revise the existing general education program, it played more of a facilitating role during the actual general education reform process at UNL.

More recently, external forces have increasingly affected the governance process of universities. For example, state governments, alumni, donors, the federal government, accrediting bodies, and other associations have directly or indirectly influenced the process via funding, policies, and external guidelines imposed upon institutions. The results of this study echo the increasingly strong influence of external forces on the general education reform process. In fact, external forces were some of the main causal conditions in this study that affected the phases of general education reform.

The biggest challenge may be that fewer faculty are participating in academic governance. Contributing to the decrease in participatory governance is the fact that fewer full-time faculty are hired, participation is not rewarded, and faculty are primarily loyal to their disciplines instead of their institutions (Kezar, 2002). This study shows that faculty were involved at four different levels but overall, faculty participation in the process was low. David Maxwell, president of Drake University, explained that governance of colleges and universities has become increasingly more complicated and
that it often requires “arcane expertise and knowledge in complex areas” (Maxwell, 2009, p. 6). He also pointed out that universities often do not reward service as much as they should. This is an issue that was also supported by this study. Several participants indicated that their departments actively “protected” junior faculty from becoming involved in the reform process. Maxwell (2009) argues that administrators must nurture the involvement of young faculty in service capacities like general education reform because they are the future of the institution. He recommends that service activities must count more heavily in the promotion and tenure process.

The governance structure at American universities is shifting from informal, consensual judgments to “standardization, litigation, and centralization” (Kezar, 2002, p. 947) fueled by a larger emphasis on accountability, quality, and efficiency. It appears that the nature of faculty governance has changed from maintenance decisions to strategic policy-making decisions. Kezar (2002) argues that this shift has caused governing bodies comprised of faculty to be seen as slow and inefficient because they were not created to deal with those types of decisions and demands. This criticism also emerged at UNL when the Faculty Senate established an ad hoc committee to try and “fix” the previous general education program. In addition, shared governance has been criticized by some that it does not actually describe governance patterns in most institutions and that administrative authority tends to overpower faculty governance at most institutions (Kezar, 2002). The responses of some participants in this study reflected this sentiment as well. Although faculty designed and implemented the new program, the administration was actively involved in each of the phases of the reform process.
General Education Reform At Other Institutions

General education reform at small, liberal arts colleges is well documented. For example, Dubrow (2004) investigated general education reform at a religiously affiliated institution and found that the reform process failed because the changes that the reform committee had recommended were too fundamental to be endorsed by the rest of the faculty. Just like at UNL, the call for change came from the administration during a time when resources could not be made available to support the process and eventually implementation of the new program. However, the process itself had a much longer timeline than at UNL. It took eight years (as opposed to UNL’s two) to develop and adopt the new program. Dubrow found that the need to build consensus slowed down the process to the extent that faculty became less involved in the process and the program itself began to resemble the previous program more and more. At UNL, not all undergraduate colleges were represented on GEAC/GEPT. Also, the planning team was small enough that it was possibly easier to achieve consensus when the actual program was developed. Consensus at UNL was not sought and did not occur until all eight colleges had to vote to adopt the new program unanimously. UNL’s reform process was also different in that it started the implementation/populating phase with existing courses. Faculty needed to make a case why and how a particular course would meet one or two of the 10 student learning outcomes that comprise ACE. At the smaller, liberal arts college Dubrow investigated, faculty were impacted more profoundly by the lack of resources because their program would require them to develop new courses to populate the program. Several lessons emerged from Dubrow’s study. He recommended that the initial developing committee must have the backing of the senior academic
administration, which the GEAC and GEPT committees had at UNL. This was evidenced by the presence of an administrator who had a background in curriculum development and who became an important facilitator. Dubrow also states that consensus and deliberation are important to retain any legitimacy in the mind of the faculty. This was a point that faculty at UNL struggled with. Some thought that their suggestions and comments were simply ignored. However, the required unanimous vote became a symbol of legitimacy as each college voted to adopt ACE at different points in time. Finally, Dubrow posits that general education reform with scarce resources will result in competition among units that are involved in the process. This is possibly the single most important advice UNL could have taken into consideration before embarking on the reform process. One might argue that resources did not matter at UNL since ACE was developed, adopted, and implemented without any major financial backing. However, the lack of financial resources caused tremendous anxiety among many faculty who continue to be skeptical about the sustainability of the program in the long run.

Most studies about general education reform focus on the content of the program or the importance of institutional culture and political contexts (Awbrey, 2005; Arnold, 2004; Dubrow, 2004; Birnbaum, 1988) but not much research focuses on the process of general education reform. Mastera (1996) explored the process of change as part of general education reform at three private baccalaureate colleges. As a result of a grounded theory study that was based on 34 in-depth interviews with faculty and administrators, she proposed seven theoretical propositions (pp. 193-200): (1) Revising the general education curriculum is a staged process; (2) Faculty will shape the stages of forming a curriculum, influence the discourse, and affect the scope and degree of change
to the general education curriculum; (3) The power of individual participants will shape the stages of forging a curriculum, influence the discourse, and affect the scope and degree of change to the general education program; (4) The composition of the curriculum revision committee and the interaction of its members have a great impact on the stages of forging the curriculum; (5) Elements of time that are inherent to a process – momentum, duration, and timing – will impact the stages of forging a curriculum and will influence how ideas are introduced, hammered out and moved along; (6) Organizational context pervasively influences the stages of forging a curriculum and the strategies participants employ to introduce new ideas, hammer them out, and move them along. In addition, organizational context interprets which factors comprise the impetus for change and determines whether or not outcomes are acceptable; (7) Discourse is the mechanism/strategy used to introduce ideas, hammer them out, and move them along.

The current study supports some of Mastera’s findings, such as the “staged process” of the reform (it occurs in phases) and the effect faculty have on the different stages. However, this study shows that, from a faculty perspective, the administration had a much more profound impact on the scope and degree of change. Not only did the administration call for the curriculum change, it also provided the framework of the program in that the committee needed to develop an outcomes-based program. The power of individuals as well as the composition were also important components of the paradigm model developed as part of this study. However, change agents also emerged even though they were not members of the developing or populating committees. While the momentum, duration, and timing of the process were major theoretical propositions in Mastera’s study, the timeline itself emerged as an important element. Faculty perceived it
as being very aggressive but acknowledged at the same time that it was a main reason why the new program got off the ground at all. Organizational context was important in the current study as well. Faculty were aware of the unique collegiality that provided a less hostile environment than in many other institutions. Finally, Mastera found that discourse is the main mechanism that keeps the reform process moving, whereas in the current study it was the results of the dynamic interplay between level of faculty involvement and power of individuals (change agents). Mastera’s study does not address the stages of implementation and sustainability of the general education reform process. It also does not include the notion of assessment, which has been identified in this study as an important ingredient in successful general education reform.

Conclusions

This study fills an important gap in the literature in that it provides a paradigm model of the general education reform process at a large, public, research-extensive university from the faculty perspective. One of the questions that remain is whether this particular reform process was successful. Many reform processes are seen as failures when they do not achieve the comprehensive change that reformers had originally planned (Kanter, Gamson, & London, 1977). Arnold and Civian (1997) describe success in reform as a general education program that is better than what was in place before. They point out that many institutions complete the process but end up with a general education program that is not much different than the one they wanted to change. This was certainly a concern expressed by the participants in this study, particularly when ACE was seen in the context of specific colleges’ additional distribution requirements.
However, this study also shows that most participants agreed that ACE is fundamentally different from CEP in that it is an outcomes-based program that will be subject to accountability measures. In addition, the traditional subject-based silos of general education courses have been diminished. For example, whereas the English department used to be the only department on campus that could provide general education writing courses, those courses can now be offered by any of the undergraduate colleges whose writing courses address all of the components of that particular ACE student learning outcome.

Another question that remains, is whether the reform process was worth the effort. The literature indicates that general education reform “can exhaust” an institution (Arnold & Civian, 1997, p. 19). This study confirmed that in addition to financial and political costs, the reform process also incurs large amounts of human and organizational costs. The process started with a relatively small number of well respected, very knowledgeable faculty and administrators who developed the new program. However, the costs increased dramatically after the new program was adopted and needed to be implemented. Although the faculty who reviewed the initial set of about 490 ACE course proposals received monetary stipends for their work, many faculty spent an inordinate amount of time preparing course proposals, revising them, and tweaking existing courses’ content to fit the ACE criteria. Although too early to tell, many faculty are concerned that the assessment requirement at the course and program level will be the real test of whether ACE can be categorized as a “success” and if the reform process “was worth the effort.”
Whether or not faculty will declare the program itself a success after it has been in place for a few years remains to be seen. However, one thing that most of the participants agreed on was that the process was necessary and for the most part, a positive experience. Although many faculty perceived the timeline of the reform process as being too aggressive, it kept the reform efforts moving. Combined with a highly effective communication plan and change agents who acted as opinion leaders in their colleges and departments, the timeline contributed to the completion of the process. However, the results of this study indicate that for faculty at UNL, completion of the process is not enough. Many of the participants saw ACE as a compromise of developing and implementing an outcomes-based general education program, while at the same time jeopardizing the quality of education as a result.

Financial backing of the reform process and the new general education program as a result of the process continues to be a challenge at most universities. This study confirmed that faculty are generally concerned with the lack of funding for general education programs. On the faculty wish list are small freshmen seminars taught only by the best instructors the university has. They also tend to ask for additional faculty lines as well as resources for faculty development. In addition, faculty often would like to have additional administrative support to direct the program itself as well as to assess it in order to ensure sustainability (Ferren & Kinch, 2003). At UNL faculty were no different but their need for additional resources would primarily go to the assessment of the courses. While funding is indeed an important concern in general education reform, Ferren and Kinch argue that resources cannot buy everything. For example, they state that one of the most important obstacles to overcome is student resistance to the new
program. Faculty need to explain what general education is and how it benefits students. They need to motivate students to do well in general education courses because “the real dollar cost to the institution is apparent when students repeat a failed course or take their tuition dollars to the local community college to fulfill a dreaded requirement” (p. 10). One of the consequences of the reform process that emerged from this study was the emphasis of marketability of the new program over other characteristics of the new program. This study confirms Arnold and Civian’s (1997) finding that administrators often like to use a new general education program as a recruiting tool.

Finally, this study echoes previous findings about teaching general education courses. Cuban (1999) suggests that the structure of a research-extensive university makes it more difficult for faculty to get involved in curricular change, primarily because research is more rewarded and valued than teaching. As Dubrow (2004) said, “Within the university, the main cogs in the teaching wheel, professors, are hired to teach but rewarded to research. Good and renowned research is a major source of financial and affective rewards for the institution. Teaching is not.” However, whereas Cuban argues that, at a research university, general education reform tends to result in modest change, this study suggests that fundamental change may be possible. Although the program itself may appear similar to the previous one to some, the fundamental change is that it is now assessable and more accountable. Whether the assessment will be meaningful and result in more effective student learning of the outcomes should be investigated in future studies.

However, Arnold and Civian (1997) note that general education reform will not cover up uninspired teaching even if the curriculum itself is improved. The reform
process at UNL focused primarily on developing the curriculum and less on the quality of teaching. This study showed that many faculty at UNL recognized this issue and continue to be concerned about it. However, “pedagogical innovations are costly, and resource-dependent institutions, in particular, experience difficulties finding the funds for such innovations” (Arnold & Civian, 1997, p. 22). This is one area that UNL did not necessarily plan for in the developing stages of the reform process, which could handicap ACE in the long-run and shorten its life cycle. Arnold and Civian warn that inconsistent quality of teaching in any general education program will send inconsistent symbolic messages to stakeholders, including students, parents, and employers. However, this potential challenge can become an opportunity if the institution decides to have its best professors teach general education courses, provide funding to improve teaching, and to keep classes small enough so that students can actively engage in learning. Speaking from a marketing perspective, UNL has a real opportunity to brand ACE as one of the first high-quality, outcomes-based general education programs in the country that provides the core of knowledge at a research-extensive, public institution.

**Limitations**

This study is limited to the perspectives of faculty about general education reform at one public, research-extensive university. One unexpected limitation was that many faculty who were not involved in ACE were unable to participate in the study because they felt that they did not have anything to contribute. Therefore, the researcher had to recruit individuals who were involved in the reform process either because they served on one of the official ACE committees or because they were otherwise integrally involved in
curriculum development in their respective colleges, either as department chairs or as representatives on a curriculum committee. Another limitation is that the study was focused only on faculty perceptions of the reform process. Individual participants sometimes had difficulty remembering facts and exact procedures. The substantive-level theory that emerged from this study can be generalized only to the subjects of the study but not to a broad population because of the purposeful, theoretical sampling frame.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was limited to the process general education reform at a public, research-extensive university as perceived by faculty. Since most research in this area concentrates on the administrator perspective, additional research that focuses on the perception of students would be fruitful, especially as student engagement in a new general education program has been identified as one of the most important determinants of success (Ferren & Kinch, 2003). In addition, the theoretical propositions that emerged from the results of this qualitative study should be tested quantitatively among a larger sample of faculty at UNL as well as other research-extensive, public institutions that are embarking on a similar general education reform process.

One of the themes that emerged from this study was that faculty described the level of collegiality among members of the developing committee as well as populating committee as a major reason why the reform process and its implementation occurred in a relatively short time frame. Future research should explore how similar committees function and how members relate to each other, respond to conflict, and negotiate solutions. A new study could focus in more depth on the group dynamics of the different
committees to better understand the development process from the perspective of committee members.

Finally, a large part of this study focused on the implementation of ACE, as participants tried to predict the effects of the new general education program. Although it was perhaps too early for them to comment on what might happen in the future, the effects of ACE should be measured after the program has been implemented for a few years and the first cycle of institutional assessment has been completed. The results of such a study, when combined with the results of this study, could provide a longitudinal perspective of general education reform at a public, research-extensive university in the United States.
References


Appendix A: ACE Governing Documents

(Source: http://ace.unl.edu/aboutace.shtml)

Institutional Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

Develop intellectual and practical skills, including proficiency in written, oral, and visual communication; inquiry techniques; critical and creative thinking; quantitative applications; information assessment; teamwork; and problem-solving.

1. Write texts, in various forms, with an identified purpose, that respond to specific audience needs, incorporate research or existing knowledge, and use applicable documentation and appropriate conventions of format and structure.

2. Demonstrate communication competence in one or more of the following ways: (a) by making oral presentations with supporting materials, (b) by leading and participating in problem-solving teams, (c) by employing a repertoire of communication skills for developing and maintaining professional and personal relationships, or (d) by creating and interpreting visual information.

3. Use mathematical, computational, statistical, or formal reasoning (including reasoning based on principles of logic) to solve problems, draw inferences, and determine reasonableness.

Build knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures and of the natural and physical world through the study of mathematics, sciences and technologies, histories, humanities, arts, social sciences, and human diversity.

4. Use scientific methods and knowledge of the natural and physical world to address problems through inquiry, interpretation, analysis, and the making of inferences from data, to determine whether conclusions or solutions are reasonable.

5. Use knowledge, historical perspectives, analysis, interpretation, critical evaluation, and the standards of evidence appropriate to the humanities to address problems and issues.

6. Use knowledge, theories, methods, and historical perspectives appropriate to the social sciences to understand and evaluate human behavior.

7. Use knowledge, theories, or methods appropriate to the arts to understand their context and significance.

Exercise individual and social responsibilities through the study of ethical principles and reasoning, application of civic knowledge, interaction with diverse cultures, and engagement with global issues.

8. Explain ethical principles, civics, and stewardship, and their importance to society.

9. Exhibit global awareness or knowledge of human diversity through analysis of an issue.

Integrate these abilities and capacities, adapting them to new settings, questions, and responsibilities.

10. Generate a creative or scholarly product that requires broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis, interpretation, presentation, and reflection.

Approved by UNL faculty as of January 2008.
Structural Criteria

Graduates of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln will satisfy the requirements of their majors, their colleges, and the ACE Program.

1. ACE courses are credit-bearing curricular offerings or equivalent documented co-curricular experiences.

2. The ACE program will consist of the equivalent of three credit hours for each of the ten ACE Student Learning Outcomes.

3. Any ACE course approved to satisfy an ACE Student Learning Outcome satisfies that Student Learning Outcome in all undergraduate colleges.

4. Up to three ACE Student Learning Outcomes 4-10 may be satisfied by work in one subject area.

5. ACE Student Learning Outcomes must be satisfied by work in at least three subject areas.

6. Any ACE course may be approved to address a maximum of two ACE Student Learning Outcomes.

7. No ACE course may satisfy more than one ACE Student Learning Outcome in a student’s program.

8. If an ACE course addresses two ACE Student Learning Outcomes, the student decides which one of the two Outcomes the course will satisfy in that student’s program.

9. Every ACE course will reinforce at least one of the following as appropriate for the discipline and as identified by the department offering the course: Writing, Oral Communication, Visual Literacy, Historical Perspectives, Mathematics and Statistics, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Ethics, Civics, Social Responsibility, Global Awareness, or Human Diversity.

Approved by UNL faculty as of January 2008.

ACE 2: Structural Criteria/p. 1/1
Populating ACE: A Process for Proposing, Reviewing, and Certifying the Initial Set of ACE Courses

I. Initial ACE Committee.
In order to facilitate the review and approval of the initial set of ACE-certified courses, a temporary Initial ACE Committee will be established.

A. Membership:
One faculty member from each UNL undergraduate college. These faculty members will be selected in accordance with the governing procedures, traditions, or special rules of their home colleges. In addition, to facilitate communication and the eventual transition, the chair of the University Curricular Committee and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies may sit as non-voting members.

B. Charge:
This temporary committee will review the initial requests submitted for ACE certification, determine which requested courses will receive that designation, and communicate their decisions to the proposing units. In cases where ACE certification is not granted, this committee will clearly communicate the reasons for this decision. In addition, this committee will work with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies to see that ACE-certified courses are communicated to the UNL community through the Undergraduate Bulletin, the OUS website, and other appropriate venues.

C. Term:
The Initial ACE Committee will be selected by May 12, 2008, and will commence its work by June 2, 2008. On August 31, 2009, the Initial ACE Committee will be dissolved and responsibility for ACE will be turned over to those groups outlined in ACE Governance and Assessment.

1 At present those colleges are Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Architecture, Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Human Sciences, Engineering, Hixson-Lied Fine and Performing Arts, and Journalism and Mass Communications.
D. Voting:
On all matters, a unanimous vote of the undergraduate college representatives is required for approval.

II. Soliciting requests.
Upon final approval of ACE, the Office of Undergraduate Studies and the University Curriculum Committee will work with deans, chairs, and heads to communicate the ACE program and the initial ACE certification request procedure to all undergraduate units and faculty members and to solicit requests for ACE certification.

III. Requests for ACE certification.
The process for requesting ACE certification and the standards for granting such requests are outlined in *ACE Governance and Assessment*.

IV. Timeline for Program Initiation.
The ACE program and those courses which have by then been ACE certified will be listed in the 2009-10 Undergraduate Bulletin. Students entering UNL in the fall of 2009 will be expected to achieve the ACE Learning Outcomes. The Comprehensive Education Program will be phased out in keeping with University guidelines.

*Approved by UNL faculty as of January 2008.*
Governance and Assessment

I. Initial ACE Committee.
In order to facilitate the review and approval of the initial set of ACE-certified courses, a temporary Initial ACE Committee will be established. (See Populating ACE for details.)

II. Long-term ACE Responsibility.
Upon the dissolution of the Initial ACE Committee, curricular responsibilities for ACE will be transferred to an ACE subcommittee of the University Curriculum Committee composed of the faculty representatives from each of the undergraduate colleges.¹

A. Membership:
The ACE subcommittee of the University Curriculum Committee is composed of one faculty member from each of the UNL undergraduate colleges. These faculty members will be selected in accordance with the governing procedures, traditions, or special rules of their home colleges. The other members of the UCC may sit in on ACE deliberations but as non-voting members only. The UCC chair will chair this ACE subcommittee but will not have a vote unless s/he is one of the faculty representatives from one of the undergraduate colleges.

B. Charge:
• Review requests for ACE certification and recertification, determining which requested courses will receive that designation, and communicating their decisions to the proposing units. In cases where ACE certification is not granted, this committee will clearly communicate the reasons for this decision.
• Work with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies to see that ACE-certified courses are communicated to the UNL community through the Undergraduate Bulletin, the OUS website, and other appropriate venues.
• Make formal recommendations to the undergraduate colleges regarding substantive changes in the ACE Program.

¹ At present those colleges are Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Architecture, Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Human Sciences, Engineering, Hixson-Lied Fine and Performing Arts, and Journalism and Mass Communications.
• Remove ACE certification when requested by the hosting department(s) or provided there is evidence the department offering the course is not meeting the terms of the ACE Certification Request.
• Coordinate, support, and review the regular assessment of the ACE program by the University-wide Assessment Committee.
• Review individual student requests for alternative means of satisfying ACE Learning Outcomes.

C. Voting:
On all matters, a unanimous vote of the undergraduate college representatives is required for approval.

III. Requests for ACE Certification.

A. Requests for ACE certification must be initiated by the department/unit that offers the course. In cases where the course is cross-listed, memos of support from cross-listed units(s) must accompany the certification request.

B. An ACE Course Certification Request Form (see online example) must accompany all requests for certification. This form asks for:
• The course number, name, and current description from the UNL Undergraduate Bulletin.
• The ACE Learning Outcome(s) that would be satisfied by the course.
• The Outcome(s) or skill(s) that would be reinforced by the course.
• A copy of the syllabus which clearly identifies:
  o The Learning Outcome(s) that would be satisfied by the course.
  o A brief description of the opportunities this course would provide for students to acquire the knowledge or skills necessary to achieve the Learning Outcome(s)
  o A brief description of the graded assignments that the instructor(s) will use to assess the students’ achievement of the Outcome(s).
• A signature from the unit chair/head affirming that the Unit will:
  o see that the syllabus for each ACE-certified course clearly indicates the ACE Outcome(s) for which the course is certified, the opportunities the course will give students to acquire the knowledge or skills necessary to achieve the Learning Outcome(s), and the graded assignments which the instructor(s) will use to assess the students’ achievement of the Outcome(s).
  o collect and assess in coordination with the ACE assessment cycle a reasonable sample of students’ products and provide reflections on students’ achievement of the Learning Outcomes for its respective ACE-certified courses.
  o provide the results of these assessments, along with samples of student work, to the college’s dean’s office or the college committee responsible for program assessment.

C. In its review of requests for ACE certification, the UCC ACE subcommittee will use such criteria as:
• Does the course clearly address the Learning Outcome(s) identified?
• Does the course provide students with opportunities to develop the knowledge/skills
necessary for successful achievement of the Learning Outcome(s)?
• Does the course provide students with opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the Learning Outcome(s)?
• Does the course reinforce at least one of the following as appropriate for the discipline and as identified by the department offering the course: Writing, Oral Communication, Visual Literacy, Historical Perspectives, Mathematics and Statistics, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Ethics, Civics, Social Responsibility, Global Awareness, or Human Diversity?
• Have the hosting department/unit and the instructor(s) agreed to follow through with their responsibilities as outlined in the ACE Course Certification Request Form?

IV. Transfers from Other Institutions.
Through established review of course equivalency and articulation agreements, the office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies will begin providing institutions from which most students transfer credit to UNL with information regarding the ACE Institutional Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes.

When a course from another institution is established as equivalent to a UNL course through articulation or equivalency agreements, then that course will fulfill the same ACE Outcome as the equivalent ACE-certified UNL course.

In cases where no articulation or equivalency agreement exists, the transferring student’s UNL home college is empowered to seek the information it needs (from the other institution, copies of course syllabi or assignments, or from an examination of graded student work for that course submitted by the student seeking equivalency credit) to make a determination of whether the transferred course can be counted for that student as ACE-equivalent.

V. ACE Certification for Co-Curricular Activities.
A student may seek to have co-curricular activities counted for no more than one ACE Learning Outcome. To do so, the student must complete an ACE Co-Curricular Request Form (see online example). This form will identify:
• The nature of the co-curricular activity.
• The ACE Learning Outcome for which the student wishes to have the co-curricular activity count.
• The faculty member who will sponsor the student in the co-curricular activity and review the student’s work.
• The number of contact hours involved in the co-curricular activity. Fifteen hours of ACE co-curricular activity will be equivalent to one credit of coursework.
• The assessable product resulting from the co-curricular activity.
• A rationale for counting this activity toward the Learning Outcome.
• A signature of support from a UNL faculty member.
• A signature of support from the faculty member’s chair/head.
• A signature of support from an appropriate representative of the faculty member’s college.

The request form must be submitted to the ACE subcommittee of the UCC for review and approval. Upon completing the co-curricular activity, the sponsoring faculty member will
submit the student’s assessable product and an assessment of that product to the ACE subcommittee of the UCC. These documents will be kept for no more than five years and will be used without attribution only for ACE program assessment.

VI. Requests for ACE Decertification.
Requests for ACE decertification may be made by the hosting department/unit of the ACE-certified course. In cases where the course is cross-listed, memos of support from cross-listed department(s)/unit(s) should accompany the decertification request. In all cases the memo requesting decertification should be accompanied by a memo of support from the dean(s) of the hosting department(s)/unit(s).

VII. ACE Program Assessment.
A. Each instructor of an ACE-certified course is responsible for:
   • seeing that the syllabus clearly indicates the ACE Outcome(s) for which the course is certified, the opportunities the course will give students to acquire the knowledge or skills necessary to achieve the Learning Outcome(s), and the graded assignments which s/he will use to assess the students’ achievement of the Outcome(s).
   • providing the hosting department/unit each semester with a reasonable sample (at least three) of students’ products (related to achievement of the appropriate ACE Learning Outcome) and assessments of those products.

B. Each hosting department/unit of an ACE-certified course is responsible for:
   • seeing that syllabi for ACE-certified courses clearly indicate the ACE Outcome(s) for which the course is certified, the opportunities the course will give students to acquire the knowledge or skills necessary to achieve the Learning Outcome(s), and the graded assignments which the instructor(s) will use to assess the students’ achievement of the Outcome(s).
   • collecting from instructors of ACE-certified courses a reasonable sample (at least three) of students’ products (related to achievement of the appropriate ACE Learning Outcome) and instructor assessments of those products.
   • reviewing and aggregating samples and summary assessments across course sections and semesters.
   • drafting a summary assessment across courses/sections that addresses:
     o General trends in the kinds of assignments used to assess student achievement of the appropriate ACE Learning Outcome(s).
     o General trends in students’ achievement of the ACE Learning Outcomes.
     o The kinds of modifications that might improve student achievement.
   • providing the results of these aggregated assessments, along with samples of student work and the summary, to the college committee responsible for program assessment.

C. Each hosting college of ACE-certified courses is responsible for:
   • collecting from each department/unit which offers ACE-certified courses the aggregated summary assessments and samples of student work.
   • reviewing and aggregating samples and summary assessments across departments and semesters.
   • drafting a summary assessment across departments/semesters that addresses:

ACE 4: Governance & Assessment/p. 4/6
o General trends in the kinds of assignments used to assess student achievement of the appropriate ACE Learning Outcome(s).
o General trends in students’ achievement of the ACE Learning Outcomes.
  
o The kinds of modifications that might improve student achievement.

• providing the results of these aggregated assessments, along with samples of student work and the summary, to the University-wide Assessment Committee.

D. The University-wide Assessment Committee in cooperation with the UCC ACE subcommittee will oversee the institutional assessment of the ACE program. A member of the UCC ACE subcommittee will be named to serve as a liaison to the University-wide Assessment Committee and will sit on that Committee as a full member. Responsibilities include:
  
• collecting and reviewing the aggregated assessments and samples of student work from the colleges which host ACE-certified courses.
• providing the UCC, the undergraduate colleges, and the rest of the UNL community with an annual report on the ACE program.
• developing and communicating a 5-year rotation for the assessment of the 10 Learning Outcomes so that the assessment process is regular, reasonable, and distributed over time.
• developing forms, processes, and guidelines that facilitate ACE program assessment
• reporting regularly to the UCC ACE subcommittee

VIII. Recertification of ACE Courses.
A. The initial set of courses certified for ACE will be divided into five groups, with different groups coming up for recertification after 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 years. Subsequently five years after a course has been certified or recertified, the ACE subcommittee of the UCC will submit an ACE Recertification Request Form (see online example) to the hosting department/unit. That form will ask the unit if it wishes to seek recertification for the course and to identify:
  
• What assessment data have revealed about how the course helps students achieve the designated Learning Outcome(s).
• How those data have been used to modify the course.
• Any other changes in the course since certification was obtained.

B. In its review of requests for ACE recertification, the UCC ACE subcommittee will use such criteria as:
• Does the course clearly address the Learning Outcome(s) identified?
• Does the course provide students with opportunities to develop the knowledge/skills necessary for successful achievement of the Learning Outcome(s)?
• Does the course provide students with opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the Learning Outcome(s)?
• Does the course reinforce at least one of the following as appropriate for the discipline and as identified by the department offering the course: Writing, Oral Communication, Visual Literacy, Historical Perspectives, Mathematics and Statistics, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Ethics, Civics, Social Responsibility, Global Awareness, or Human Diversity?
• Has the hosting department/unit used assessment data to improve the course?
• Have the hosting department/unit and the instructor(s) followed through with their responsibilities as outlined in the ACE Course Certification Request Form?
IX. The Role of Undergraduate Studies.
The Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of Undergraduate Studies will be responsible for supporting the work of the Initial ACE Committee and the UCC ACE subcommittee. (This office currently supports the work of UCC and the University-wide Assessment Committee.) Such support may include:

- funding for ACE program development and assessment.
- hosting an ACE website where current information about program requirements, ACE-certified courses, the assessment process and institutional-level program assessment results, and ACE forms are readily available.
- keeping ACE sections of the Undergraduate Bulletin and ACE websites current.
- facilitative infrastructure and clerical support.
- fielding, addressing, and communicating concerns about the ACE program.
- working with deans, chairs/heads, Academic Affairs, the Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Admissions to see that ACE serves our students well.

Approved by UNL faculty as of January 2008.
Appendix B: LEAP/ACE Comparison

(Source: [http://www.unl.edu/ous/ace/ACEandLEAP.shtml](http://www.unl.edu/ous/ace/ACEandLEAP.shtml))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AAC&amp;U’s Essential Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>UNL’s Institutional Learning Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World</td>
<td>Build knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures and of the natural and physical world through the study of mathematics, sciences and technologies, histories, humanities, arts, social sciences, and human diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual and Practical Skills</td>
<td>Develop intellectual and practical skills, including proficiency in written, oral, and visual communication; inquiry techniques; critical and creative thinking; quantitative applications; information assessment; teamwork; and problem-solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Social Responsibility</td>
<td>Exercise individual and social responsibilities through the study of ethical principles and reasoning, application of civic knowledge, interaction with diverse cultures. And engagement with global issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Learning</td>
<td>Integrate these abilities and capacities, adapting them to new settings, questions, and responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Recruitment Email

Dear Prof. ____,

I am a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Sciences and am conducting a research project that explores the process of general education reform at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). The purpose of this grounded theory study will be to generate a theory that explains the process of developing and implementing new “Achievement-Centered Education” (ACE) general education program at UNL from a faculty perspective. I will conduct open-ended in-depth interviews to collect data. You were selected to participate in this study because you are a faculty member at UNL who has been involved in the process/implementation of ACE. It will take no longer than 60 minutes to participate in this study.

The data generated from the interviews will be treated confidentially and will only be seen by the principal and secondary investigators. With your permission completed interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Your name will not appear on the transcripts or the research report. Digital audio files and transcriptions will be kept for seven years on the principal investigator’s personal computer in a password-protected folder and then permanently deleted.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. You may find the opportunity to reflect on the general education reform process at UNL enjoyable. The information gained from this study may help to better understand the process of ACE from a faculty perspective. You will have an opportunity to see and comment on emerging categories and theory development. There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Your decision to participate is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision will not adversely affect your relationship with the investigator or the University of Nebraska. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Frauke Hachtmann
Principal Investigator

Dr. Aleidine Moeller
Secondary Investigator
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introduction

I am a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Sciences and am conducting a research project that explores the process of general education reform at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). The purpose of this grounded theory study will be to generate a theory that explains the process of developing and adopting the new “Achievement-Centered Education” (ACE) general education program at UNL from a faculty perspective. You were selected to participate in this study because you are a faculty member at UNL who has been involved with ACE and are in a unique position to describe the process. You are one of about 30 faculty on campus who will be participating in this study.

I would like to audio-record the interview and then transcribe it. Your name will not appear on the transcripts or in the final research report. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any time, I will do so. Before we begin, please read and sign the informed consent form in front of you.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself: what is your current position; what department do you teach in and what courses do you teach? How long have you been at UNL?

2. Describe your college and department. What role does it play in general education reform? How is it different from other colleges and departments in regard to general education reform?

3. How did you participate in ACE?

4. What does “general education” mean to you?

5. Do you think that general education at UNL needed to be improved? Why or why not?

6. How did you and other faculty become aware of general education reform on campus?
7. How was it decided that UNL’s general education program would be changed?

8. How were you and other faculty involved in the process and adoption of general education reform on campus?

9. How were you and other faculty not involved in the process and adoption of general education reform on campus?

10. Which individuals or groups were most influential in the development of ACE? What did they do?

11. Which individuals or groups influenced the adoption of ACE? What did they do?

12. What was the communication process during the development and adoption process of ACE? How was information shared? How was disagreement addressed?

13. How did the adoption unfold in your unit/college? Start at the beginning and describe the major events. (Who did what, when, and why?)

14. How did the adoption process unfold on campus? Start at the beginning and describe the major events. (Who did what, when, and why?)

15. How is ACE different from the previous Comprehensive Education Program (CEP)?

16. How would you describe the benefits of ACE from your perspective as a faculty member? Describe the advantages, faculty buy-in, and support expressed by faculty.

17. How would you describe the challenges of ACE from your perspective as a faculty member? Describe the anxieties, conflicts, and concerns expressed by faculty.

18. In terms of general education reform, how would it ideally be developed and adopted? What are the steps that are involved?
19. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about the development and adoption of ACE that would help me understand the process from a faculty perspective?

20. Are there any other faculty members in your college or on campus you recommend I interview for the purpose of this study?

Closing

Thank you so much for your time and insights. After I complete all of my interviews I may contact you again to get additional input based on the data I have collected. You will have an opportunity to see and comment on emerging categories and theory development. I would very much appreciate your input in that particular stage of the research.
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Identification of Project
The Process of General Education Reform from a Faculty Perspective

Purpose of the Research
This is a qualitative research project exploring the process of general education reform at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). The purpose of this grounded theory study will be to generate a theory that explains the process of developing and implementing “Achievement-Centered Education” (ACE) at UNL from a faculty perspective.

Procedures
You will be asked to answer a series of open-ended questions about UNL’s new general education program from your perspective as a faculty member. It will take no longer than 60 minutes to participate in the study. The researcher may ask you to participate in a follow-up interview that would take no longer than 30 minutes of your time. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The researcher will also take notes during the interview. The data will be treated confidentially and will only be seen by the principal and secondary investigators. The digital audio files as well as the transcriptions will be kept on the principal investigator’s personal computer in a password-protected folder. After seven years all records will be permanently deleted. You will have an opportunity to see and comment on emerging categories and theory development.

Risks and/or Discomforts
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits
You may find the opportunity to reflect on the general education reform process at UNL enjoyable. The information gained from this study may help to better understand the process of general education reform from a faculty perspective. You are welcome to receive a copy of the finished study if you wish.

Confidentiality
There is a small risk that your identity may be revealed by the thick, rich description of the themes and quotes. Therefore, the researcher cannot guarantee confidentiality but will take precautions to ensure against breaches of confidentiality. Each interview will be assigned an alias that will be used in thick, rich data description, as well as to identify participants for coding and data storage. Digital audio files and transcriptions of interviews will be stored in a password-protected folder on the investigator’s personal computer for seven years and then permanently deleted. The information obtained in this study may be published as part of a doctoral dissertation, in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings. The qualitative data will be presented in themes and illustrated with direct quotes but the identity of the respondent will not be directly revealed.

Compensation
There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

Opportunity to Ask Questions
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing.
to participate in or during the study. Or you may call the investigator at any time, office phone, (402) 472-9848, or after hours (402) 730-9183. Please contact the investigator:

- If you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research
- In the event of a research related injury

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:

- You wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant
- To voice concerns or complaints about the research
- To provide input concerning the research process in the event the study staff could not be reached

**Freedom to Withdraw**

Your decision to participate is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision will not adversely affect your relationship with the investigator or the University of Nebraska nor will it negatively or positively affect your grade for this course. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent, Right to Receive a Copy**

By signing this informed consent form you agree to participate in this study and having read and understood the information presented. Your decision to participate or not participate is completely voluntary, and your signature certifies that you have decided to participate. You will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Please indicate below whether you consent to have your interview audio-recorded:

- Yes [ ]
- No [ ]

---

**Signature of Research Participant**

**Date**

**Name and Phone Numbers of Investigators**

Frauke Hachtmann .................. 402-472-9848
Dr. Aleidine Moeller ............... 402-472-2024
Appendix F: Paradigm Model of “Phases of General Education Reform at a Research-Extensive University